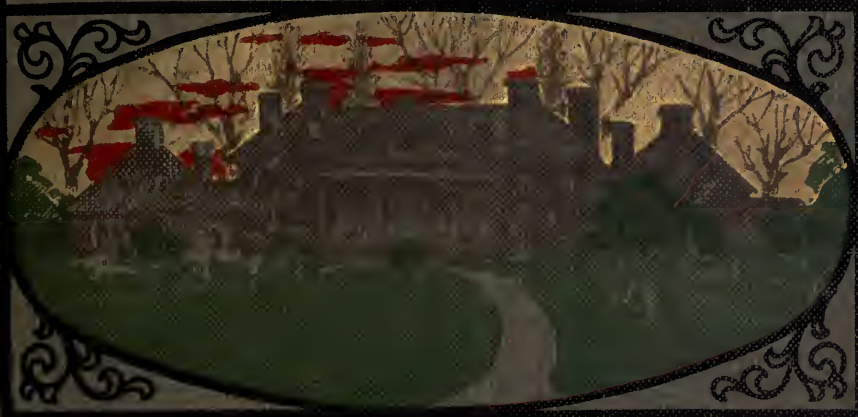
A MARYLAND MANOR



A NOVEL

by Frederic Emory

A MARYLAND MANOR

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A MARYLAND MANOR

A Novel of Plantation Aristocracy and its Fall

By Frederic Emory

With a Frontispiece by

B. West Clinedinst

NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
Publishers

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CHAPTER I

THE steamboat Severn had just left her wharf in the harbour of Baltimore for one of the Tidewater counties of Maryland. It was a little after daybreak, and the leaden grey of the east was tinged with a faint flush of rose. A cutting breeze made shelter welcome, and all the passengers, save two, had sought the warmth of the saloon. These two were standing aft on the hurricane deck, and one of them—a tall, well-knit young fellow in a suit of grey tweed—was gazing moodily down upon the furrow of foam the vessel left in her wake. His companion—a stout, vulgar-looking man of middle age, in black broadcloth and an antiquated stovepipe hat—was regarding him with some uneasiness.

"Really, Oswald," he said in an injured tone, "you seem to be anything but glad to get home."

"I'm not glad, father," said Oswald irritably, "I wish you had let me stay abroad."

"What—for good? Separate myself permanently from you? Impossible, my boy!"

"You might have come to me," suggested Oswald, a gleam of satire in his dark blue eyes. He knew the idea was absurd. Even had he cared for his father's society—and nothing could have been more unwelcome—it would have been difficult to entice him far from home. Not that his home had any inherent attraction for him. Mr. Reeve,

indeed, felt quite as strong a distaste for it as his son seemed to cherish. It was the one spot above all others where he would have chosen not to live, but chance had anchored him there, and he clung to it tenaciously because it had come to be the centre of his interests, his purposes in life. These absorbed him to the exclusion of every consideration save his affection for his son. Even this was subordinate to and helped to feed his special ambitions. Naturally coarse and masterful, with a cold, calculating mind and a firm conviction that material advancement was everything, he was impatient of any softer feelings that might conflict with the objects he had at heart. The only luxury of the sort that he permitted himself was his weakness for his elegant, handsome boy, and he flattered himself he had that, too, under good control. For years he had been the slave of his profession—the law—and had begrudged every moment that was not occupied with business as a foolish waste of time. It was with a guilty sense of extravagance that he had yielded to the temptation to take two whole days from his affairs in order that he might go to Baltimore and meet Oswald returning from a long stay in Europe. He had tried hard to dissuade himself, and await his son's arrival, but curiosity had finally overcome his scruples.

He was eager to see what Oswald was like. They had been parted for nearly two years. Had he acquired the polish he had sent him abroad to seek? He had soon satisfied himself on this point; he was even beginning to fear Oswald had too much polish. There was a fastidiousness in his dress, his manner, his whole appearance that made the father proud, and yet uncomfortable. What did Oswald think of him? No doubt, he seemed awkward, uncouth, "common" to this exceedingly refined young person.

"Come to you!" he exclaimed, with a nervous laugh, in

answer to his son's suggestion, "why, half the county would have been in a mess. The business of all the big people is in my hands. Every old family has got into the habit of saying it 'can't do without Reeve'—damn them."

He uttered the last two words with some heat, but also with some complacency.

"You seem to be making a good thing of it—why damn them?" asked Oswald. He knew well enough, but was curious to hear his father's reasons. He wondered whether he had any fresh causes of offence.

"Because they insist upon treating me as if I were nothing more than a machine. They use my brains—why? Because they find it to their advantage. But as to associating with me, no indeed! I am a better man than any of them; I can twist them and turn them to any purpose I choose; they follow meekly where I lead—in all matters of business. Their confidence in me is unbounded; I could ruin them if I wished. You might suppose they would fear me. Not at all. It never enters their heads that I would dare to hurt them. What, the son of an overseer presume to cherish the thought of injury to them! And Colonel Cheston is the worst of them all. He thinks his family made me, because his father, the Judge, took me into his office, a ragged boy, and taught me law. That man makes my blood boil; he is always so lofty. One might suppose I was one of his niggers."

Oswald shivered slightly.

"You ought to be able to understand," he said, looking away from his father, "why I'm not glad to get back to *that*."

"But it will be different for you." There was a touch of eagerness, as if to convince, in the elder man's tone. "Your mother was a lady, if she did marry me. Her people, though poor, are first-rate, and will help you along. Besides, the

most hidebound of these aristocrats can't resist you. The Colonel always liked you. If he puts the Cheston stamp on you, you're safe. No one will dispute his verdict. He's the social autocrat of the county, as you know."

Oswald glanced at his father rather pityingly. He was a shrewd man—no "sharper" lawyer, people said, in the whole circuit—and yet, he could so delude himself. None knew better the nature of the prejudices he expected him to overcome. His mother's social position could be of little benefit to him. It was but a memory. She had long been dead. His father was living—an active irritant to these prejudices, as he had always been. Had he not just put the real situation clearly, if coarsely, in saying that Colonel Cheston had but little more regard for him than for "one of his niggers"? How could he, Oswald, hope to escape the social ignominy of the fact that "Lawyer Reeve," as he was popularly, and by some contemptuously called, was his father? The "old families" might consent, for his mother's sake, to receive him in their homes, though he was by no means sanguine even as to this, but it would be on sufferance only, and his father's presence in these same houses as a mere hireling, with no title to social recognition, would always be a barrier to that equality which he felt to be his right. In Europe, he had moved in the best circles of the great capitals. His ample means—for his father, naturally close, had not stinted him in his allowance—his good looks, his easy manners had enabled him to win his way in the most exclusive "sets." No one asked for his pedigree. It was enough that he was a rich young American, of good address. They accepted Americans over there without laying too much stress upon their antecedents, if they were well-behaved and amusing. But here, in his own home, it was different. Here, he was known as Lawyer Reeve's son. Here, his social status could be accurately gauged. Every-

one would recall the fact that his grandfather had been a "poor white," an overseer. This narrow rural aristocracy, while it might tolerate him, on occasion, would always hold him at arm's length, ready, at any moment, to check the least symptom of presumption.

Nor could he have looked for sympathy, even had he cared for it, outside this class. There were no elements capable of making head against it. His pretensions would be viewed with derision even by the "poor whites." The aristocratic principle was so thoroughly ingrained in Tidewater society that a man was generally held to be foolish who attempted to run counter to it. Slavery here, as elsewhere in the South, had built up a plantation caste which dominated everything. In this instance, hereditary and local influences had combined to fix it hard and fast in very nearly its original lines, laid down by colonists of Stuart times. Nowhere did the old English ideas of rank, of consequence attaching to the ownership of land, of limiting control of affairs to a privileged few, flourish so luxuriantly or linger so long on American soil as on the shores of the Chesapeake and its tributaries.

Oswald knew but little of the origin or causes of this condition of things, but he was thoroughly familiar with its practical effects. It seemed to him the very appearance of the country was typical of the spirit of conservatism, of unchanging fixity of habits which opposed a stolid indifference to new ideas. On the one side, the Tidewater region was shielded from the buffets of the Atlantic by the Delaware Peninsula; on the other, from the full scope of the western winds by a barrier of hills ascending gradually to the vast bulwark of the Alleghanies. It lay inert, contented, smiling in its comparative immunity from rude disturbance. Its surface was either flat, or slightly rolling, with here and there a range of cliffs of yellow clay, or prominent bluffs

along the shores of the bay. There were many broad, slow-moving rivers, into which flowed a network of creeks and coves scarcely less sluggish. Everywhere, one met the same suggestion of leisure, of obstinate placidity. A poetic beauty might often be found in the silvery reaches of the water-courses; in the brooding mystery of great salt marshes, with their creeping thoroughfares or still lagoons, or of dark, stagnant pools in the heart of lonely stretches of forest; in distant glimpses of sunlit spaces of the bay beyond low points or islands clothed with phalanxes of pines, but it was beauty of the passive kind which rarely strikes a stern or tragic note. The Chesapeake and its estuaries were the only potent elements of change. The great bay was sometimes boisterous enough, but its usual aspect was one of dreamy calm or languorous movement, and its occasional fits of rage but served to emphasise the general quietude.

As Nature here was in a state of self-satisfied indolence, so, with but few exceptions, were the people. Their surroundings were all benign. They considered themselves peculiarly favoured, and cherished so strong a conceit in their kindly soil, their genial climate, the choiceness of their viands, that it often moved them to compassion for the world at large. The home of the canvas-back duck, the diamond-back terrapin; the Chesapeake oyster, the bay mackerel, the tailor, the shad, might be expected to breed a race of epicureans. Existence was made so easy, so pleasant, so restful for them, that it was but natural they should wish it to move on undisturbed, at the same leisurely gait, like the slow ebb and flow of the tide which gave the region its name. Life quickened its pace only as it got farther and farther away from the basin of the Chesapeake and began to climb the slopes of the restless world beyond.

There was, in fact, a sharp line of cleavage between the

people of the Tidewater counties and those who dwelt in the higher, less sheltered, portions of the state. The latter felt the tonic of sharper, more invigorating winds; they were brought into contact with the busy activity of the world at large; the stress of competition, of difficulties to be met and conquered developed their energies in many ways unknown to their softly placed brethren of the lowlands. Mechanical industries flourished among them; there were factories and mines and busy towns; the lands were divided into small holdings supporting thrifty, hard-working families; the atmosphere was thoroughly democratic. Oswald Reeve would have had no serious inequalities confronting him there; his father would have found a free field for his ambition, his bustling energy.

The Tidewater region, on the other hand, was almost wholly agricultural, with large acreages in tobacco or in wheat and corn, and society was divided broadly into two classes—the planters, with scores of slaves, who owned nearly all the land—and the "poor whites," including tenants and overseers, who had neither land nor slaves. An intermediate class, recruited from both, and composed chiefly of shopkeepers, was but vaguely defined. It could have no strong individuality of its own, from the fact that it was, to a large extent, parasitic, depending for sustenance chiefly upon the planters. Here and there, a "small farmer" might be found who owned his land, but he, too, attached himself as a rule to some planter under whose protecting authority he found safe refuge from difficulties which were beyond his strength. Every Tidewater neighborhood had its local magnate, its petty great man, the legitimate descendant of the old English squire. The popular attitude towards these personages was one of good-humored sufferance. There was no general discontent with their monopoly of dignities, of political as well as of social honors, or even their exclu-

siveness, for the reason that the people were used to their control, and had found, upon the whole, that it worked very well and saved them trouble and bother to which they were not in the least inclined.

It was an amiable despotism, when not opposed. Its temper was seldom ruffled except by impertinent encroachments upon its dignity. It rested, serene and confident, in custom, tradition, the general inaptitude for change. It was only now and then that some bold spirit, with private ambitions of his own, had the hardihood to dispute its authority or to seek to share its privileges against its will. Suppression, in one way or another, was his inevitable fate. He was snuffed out socially, or if his aspirations were political, he was disciplined in party conventions or at the polls. The planter found his "poor white" followers invaluable in the latter case, and seldom had to complain of their lack of zeal. They were, if anything, more intolerant than he of efforts on the part of members of their class to rise above the general level. If they were to have people over them, they preferred that they should be those to whom they had always been accustomed. *They* were genuine, they had an inherited claim to respect; the "new people" were merely "puttin' on airs" and their anxiety to separate themselves as widely as possible from their former associates usually stirred the latter to resentment and to active efforts to reduce them to a proper state of humility. Naturally, the discomfited aspirants were often bitter.

Owsald Reeve knew that his father had been one of the most obstinate of these malcontents, and that his experiences had been such as to make him particularly sour. His vanity was extreme; his ambition inordinate. He often boasted to his familiars that he was wholly a self-made man. It was true Judge Cheston had educated him and set him up as a lawyer, but his own shrewdness and energy alone had enabled

him to achieve success. The qualities which had commended him as a useful attorney, a clever business man, ought, in his opinion, to count in his favor in politics, in social life. It was just the contrary. His self-confidence, his "push," his insensibility to rebuffs, which gave him a distinct advantage in business affairs, served only to bring into stronger relief an ingrained coarseness which inflamed the prejudices he sought to overcome. He hoped to win by a kind of *tour de force* what could only be won by patient and slow approaches and by fitting himself for the association he desired.

No doubt, he realized instinctively that the last was impossible for him; his tastes were ineradicably vulgar, his manners unalterably "common." Try as hard as he might, he could never imitate successfully the little niceties of speech and bearing which he envied in Colonel Cheston, for example. It was out of the question for him to act, much less to think and feel as gentlemen did. He succeeded only in making himself ridiculous. It was the consciousness of this that caused him to rely all the more upon his fancied resources for compelling recognition. Among these, he gave the first place to the power of money, and his natural cupidity was intensified by his ambition. He devoted all his energies to the acquisition of a fortune, and as, little by little, he got control of the affairs of many large estates, and his general practice as a lawyer steadily increased, he became, in course of time, a man of considerable wealth. The reputation of being a money-lender gave him undoubted weight in the community which he sought to increase by ostentatious display.

He could hardly have committed a more serious blunder. There was nothing more obnoxious to the Tidewater squires than a vulgar opulence. Many of them were "land poor," and, for that reason, they insisted the more jealously upon

their claims to consideration on the score of position and blood. Money was a dangerous foe to their prestige. It was all very well so long as Reeve grew rich in their service without thrusting his money under their noses; it was quite another matter when he undertook to use it as a means of lifting himself to equality with them. The impudence of the fellow became outrageous when it was learned that he had taken advantage of the poverty of one of their very best families to persuade a member of it—a middle-aged spinster whose hopes of a socially eligible match had faded—to become his wife. His motive was perfectly clear; he hoped to avail himself of her family connections to improve his status. It had been a matter of bargain and sale. Their sense of security was shaken. If one of their class could be tempted by money, others might be. The thing must be stopped at once. Mrs. Reeve was made to feel that she had committed a social enormity. The poor woman, who soon discovered that her husband was incorrigible, suffered cruelly from her isolation, and gradually withered away. As for Reeve, the lines were drawn more tightly against him than ever.

He made a stubborn fight of it, but finally gave up the struggle on his own behalf, and pinned all his hopes upon his son. The boy, who seemed to "take after" his mother in traits of sensitiveness and instinctive refinement, which he had certainly not inherited from him, might be able to obtain for him what he had so signally failed to obtain for himself. Reeve set to work with great zeal to make the most of these qualities. His son should have the advantages that had been denied to him. He must never have cause to complain of the ignorance of those fine airs and graces which had so often humiliated and baffled him. He wished him to be fitted, at all points, for association with his mother's people. They could hardly refuse to recognise him if he showed him-

self to be well-bred and responsive to their finicky ideas, and it was more than probable they would, at last, consent to accept *him* for his son's sake. All he asked was an entering wedge; he would know how to go ahead when once inside the pale.

In pursuance of this design, which he thought very clever, he employed a "lady-governess," and afterwards, a "gentlemon-tutor" for Oswald and surrounded him with servants bred in old families. He sought in every possible way to stimulate his ambition, to inculcate in him "genteel" tastes, and even to suppress his own individuality as far as possible in the boy's presence, lest it contaminate him with ideas and habits which he could not shake off. When he was old enough, he sent him to Harvard, and after he had completed the course there, he decided it would be well for him to spend a couple of years in Europe. That was a kind of "finishing off" which ought to give him a distinct advantage among his future associates. But few of the Tidewater families sent their sons abroad, and a young man who had travelled extensively was always an object of interest and emulation among them.

It was not until now that he saw him again, that Lawyer Reeve realised the possible dangers of the scheme of education which he had pursued so confidently. Perhaps he had overdone the thing. He had never concerned himself on this point before. He had known all along that Oswald was growing more and more unlike him; less and less sympathetic; it was what he wished. The fewer the points of similarity between them, the better. He had thought to attach him to him by his liberality, his zeal in his interests, his energy in "pushing" him. How could his son help being grateful? Did he not owe everything to him? Would not his evident utility atone for the lack of qualities that were merely ornamental? He was not so sure. He didn't

like the way Oswald looked at him; it reminded him of the cool, disparaging criticism he had so often read in the eyes of the people who habitually snubbed him. Was it possible he must be cautious about taking liberties with his own son? Nonsense! The boy needed him; he couldn't get on without him—he must soon see that. He would have to put up with him, whether he liked it or not. Nevertheless, he was very uncomfortable. Oswald might take it into his head to rebel.

Oswald wished, from the bottom of his heart, he could rebel. Nothing would have pleased him better than to cut loose from his father. He was conscious of no obligation to feel grateful to him. He had discovered long ago that his affection was largely selfish, that it was his own ambition he sought to gratify first of all. He felt that he was little more than a convenient tool. From early childhood, he had suffered keenly from his clumsy efforts to use him as a means of exploiting himself. He had often caused him mortification and distress by taking him to plantation houses in order that he might "show off." On such occasions, Oswald had seen clearly enough that he was an object merely of compassionate curiosity; the "Quality" evidently pitied him because of his father, but were restrained from showing him more than a polite approbation, lest Reeve seek to reap some profit from their indulgence. It was even harder for him when he was brought into contact with the children of these families. They were not so considerate as their parents. On the contrary, they were often brutally frank, and with the unconscious arrogance of childhood, seemed to take pleasure in making him feel his inferiority. Sometimes they were openly scornful of his fine clothes, his costly toys, his bountiful supply of spending money; in their crude logic, he had no right to these things. His trials of this sort were really agonising; there is no suffer-

ing greater than that of a sensitive child exposed to such slights.

His situation, now, was even worse. His tastes were fully formed, his habits fixed, his standards definite. He had been a swell in cautious clubs and fashionable drawing-rooms of London and Paris, a social favourite, an elegant idler. The gulf between him and his father had widened immeasurably. His experiences abroad had been precisely such as to make his father's vulgarity, his solecisms of speech and manner, obnoxious to him. He had feared this when he received a summons to return; the reality was harsher, even, than he had imagined. His father was socially impossible. Imagine having to introduce him to some of his foreign friends! Thank Heaven, he would be spared that, but what consolation was there in the fact that though he would not have to stand sponsor for him at home, his father would inevitably attempt to stand sponsor for *him?* Oh, yes, he saw it all so plainly! There would never be a moment of freedom for him. He would be handicapped at every turn by his fatuous activity. It would be just as it had been throughout his boyhood—the smart, self-confident attorney busying himself, as he would have busied himself with a case in court, with cheap shyster tricks and expedients which would have only the effect of thrusting him into an unpleasant prominence, of exposing him to more resentful criticism. He felt he might come to hate this burly, complacent, irrepressible figure if it were always at his elbow, eager to "push" him.

Cut loose from him? How could he? He had no resources in himself. If he were capable of earning his own livelihood, it might be possible to escape to some place where Tidewater prejudices did not exist and begin over again. But he had been bred in idleness and was utterly unfit for even manual labor. His father had always pooh-

poohed the idea of his engaging in business or studying a profession. "It's your business to be a gentleman, my son," he had once said, adding, with a wink and a slap on his trousers' pocket, "I've enough here for both of us. There's no need for you to work; I've saved you from that." Oswald had acquiesced with no idea that work, repugnant as it had already become to him, might, some day, seem less grinding than a luxurious slavery in the midst of the conditions he was now about to face. It had been pleasant enough—this playing gentleman—away from his father; he realised, too late, that he had lost the energy, the inclination, even, to be anything else. He had been caught in the web of desires, of habits, of tastes which only a large income could satisfy. He was wholly dependent upon his father; he must do what he wished.

All the way home from Europe he had been striving to convince himself it might not be so bad, but from the instant his father had greeted him in Baltimore until now that they were actually on the final stage of his journey, the prospect had steadily darkened, and he had, at last, reached a pitch of nervous impatience which was almost beyond control. His father's presence made what lay before him so imminent, so vivid, so coarsely real. He glanced down more than once upon the churning waters at the stern, with an absurd desire to fling himself into them. It was all so trivial, and yet so tragic. Most people would think him a fool for taking it so much to heart; of course, his father would think so; it was only those who felt, as he felt, that social proscription meant the denial of all that made life pleasant and desirable who could realize the rank injustice, the humiliation, the actual torture of it.

"Father," he said suddenly, "I almost wish you had never tried to make a gentleman of me; it might have been better for both of us."

"Why, what do you mean?" gasped Reeve, with a look of consternation. For a moment, he feared Oswald was already in a state of mutiny.

Oswald shrugged his shoulders and turned away. He could not very well tell his father, to his face, that he was ashamed of him; that he would have been much more comfortable in his society if he were less unlike him; that he might even have sympathised with him had he never been raised above his level. But Lawyer Reeve did not need to be told. His spirits sank. It was but too evident to him, now, that his son regarded him as an incubus.

"Don't say that," he exclaimed, almost piteously, "I've spent such a lot of money on you!"

Oswald laughed harshly. It was so like him to think of that! Everything had its pecuniary significance to him, first of all.

"Besides," continued Reeve eagerly, "you'll get used to—to"—he was about to say "me," but stopped short, unwilling to put the fact so baldly to his son. He substituted the word "things." "It won't be half so hard," he added, "when you've shown people what you are. You are worried, now, by fancies that time will cure. Take my word for it, they are really exaggerated. I'm not the man to underrate our difficulties—haven't I been floored by them, again and again? But you're a horse of another colour. Cheer up, my boy; we're bound to win!"

He had gathered confidence as he proceeded; his tone was almost boisterous at the close. It grated on Oswald.

"Some one else is on deck," exclaimed Reeve suddenly, glancing forward. "Do you see that girl, there, by the wheelhouse? I wish she were here beside you, in my place; you'd find her interesting. She's the beauty of the county."

"Who is she?" asked Oswald, with a careless glance.

She seemed to be a graceful creature and carried herself well. As yet, he could not see her face.

"The Colonel's daughter—Lydia Cheston."

"Could you not introduce me?" asked Oswald dryly.

"I wouldn't dare," said his father hastily, confused. "Haven't I told you of the footing on which I stand in her father's house? Besides, she doesn't like me; she flouts me whenever she gets the chance."

"You see?" said Oswald, bitterly, "I knew how it would be; we shall run against this sort of thing at every turn."

"No, you won't, if we are careful. I—I think I'll leave you for awhile. It would be better if, at first, she didn't see you with me. Take a good look at her; I assure you, it'll be worth your while."

Before Oswald could protest, if he were inclined to do so, his father had turned away and was hurrying below.

CHAPTER II

THE sun had risen, and hung, a globe of crimson, just clear of the distant water-line towards which the steamer was heading. Long shafts of flame marked tremulous stripes on the blue expanse of the Patapsco. From a group of iron furnaces on the northern bank of the river, dense clouds of smoke rolled forth and floated off in patches of purple and lavender. A mantle of haze enveloped, without concealing, the city, now several miles away, which rose, in curving tiers, along the face of a chain of hills. The effect was that of a vast amphitheatre of variously tinted stone flushed with amethyst light and vaguely outlined against the dark, rugged summits which brooded sullenly in the background.

Lydia Cheston seemed to Oswald, as he watched her without moving from his place, to have taken just the position in which to present herself to the best advantage. She was standing well forward of the wheel-house near the guard-rail, and there was nothing between her and the setting of sky and water ahead. From this luminous screen, her slender figure, clothed in some dark woollen stuff, stood out in bold relief. She was very graceful, and as the vessel rolled in the swell of a rather stiff breeze, she kept her footing, apparently with little effort, and swayed easily to and fro in a kind of instinctive rhythm. She was evidently used to this sort of thing. Oswald fancied the poetry of motion, both on water and land, was something she had unconsciously studied from her earliest years. Her family, he knew, like most of those of the Tidewater planters, were devoted to every form of exercise and enjoyment in the open air. Sailing, fox-hunting, galloping about the country, were their daily

amusements. It was these, no doubt, that had given her this easy confidence, this supple grace.

But was she a "beauty," as his father had asserted? Her back was still turned towards him, and it was impossible, as yet, to obtain a glimpse of her face. All that he could see was a mass of curling hair, with a reddish gleam in it, tucked up rather loosely under a wide-brimmed hat, and the tips of two tiny ears. He moved forward as close to her as he dared, hoping she would change her position, but she seemed absorbed. Apparently, her gaze was fixed upon some object far away, but looking beyond her, Oswald saw nothing but the glittering surface of the bay.

The sun was now fully abroad, and its beams, changed from crimson to gold, cast a myriad of diamond points upon the steel blue depths of the river which was tossing in long, crested waves. Vessels under full sail were scudding before the wind or tacking in the contrary direction. Others lay at anchor, awaiting tugs. Ocean steamers moved slowly along, feeling their way cautiously in the narrow channel. Coquettish little canoes danced impudently near the massive bows of huge "three-masters" whose cobweb of ropes was delicately outlined against the clear sky. Sea-gulls flitted hither and thither, and occasionally, swept in graceful curves about the vessel, showing flashes of snowy white at certain angles of their flight. A salty flavour was perceptible in the breeze, a sign that the steamer was nearing the Bay. Lydia threw back her head and seemed to be drinking in the bracing air with eager relish, but did not change the direction of her gaze. Oswald was strongly tempted to do something that would make her look round. He was saved this imprudence by the sudden arrival on the scene of a dog—a coal-black setter who, with long, graceful leaps, bounded up to the girl, and with a loud bark, stretched himself close to her and began to pull her dress, rapping the deck vig-

orously with his tail. Lydia turned quickly, with a merry laugh.

"Well, Rover, you have found me," she exclaimed, "I thought I'd given you the slip."

The face revealed to Oswald was something rare. He was reminded, at once, of the head of a Flora he had seen on a cameo brooch at a famous lapidary's in Rome. It seemed marvellous that chiselling so fine and true could have been wrought out in flesh and blood. It was a proud, sensitive face, lit up by great dark eyes which gave it soul and vividness, and the glow of an ardent temper. Oswald Reeve was a rather blasé young squire of dames, and inclined to be critical of feminine beauty. Even now, he was not sure that she was beautiful, according to his standards—he did not stop to ask himself the question—but she possessed the gift of charm. That was indisputable. He felt it at the first glance. It was a kind of charm that was altogether new to him. He would like to analyse it at his leisure. Hitherto, he had classified all women as belonging to certain types. If Lydia Cheston belonged to any type, he had stumbled upon a new species.

"We are still far away, Rover," she said softly, stooping to stroke the setter's glossy coat, "I have been looking so hard, and can see nothing yet, not even the tiniest speck of land. Our land, old fellow! Come, we will watch together; perhaps we may catch a glimpse of it soon. Just to think of being there, Rover—at home, you understand. Can't you picture it all—the dear old house, the garden, the fields, the woods for you to roam through, instead of those horrid streets and alleys? Ah, what rambles we shall have—you and I!"

Rover gazed up at her longingly and wagged his tail with a vigour intended, perhaps, to express delight. There was certainly a look of some kind of comprehension in his clear yellow eyes.

"Come with me," said his mistress, "we'll find out from Captain Grimes just how much longer it will be."

As she spoke, she started towards the wheel-house, where the master of the vessel happened to be alone at the wheel. He was a short, thick-set old mariner of ruddy visage, seamed and wrinkled, with a pair of keen blue eyes which brightened perceptibly at sight of the girl's charming face at one of the windows. Shifting a huge quid of tobacco from one side of his mouth to the other, and wiping his lips on his coat-sleeve, he said, in a hearty voice:

"Well, Miss Lydyer, how goes it?"

"Dreadfully slow, Captain," she said, with a rueful air, "Can't you put on a little more steam?"

"Not without bustin' the biler. We're givin' her, now, all the law allows. It seems slow to you because you're goin' home. It's always the way with you, ever since I can remember. There was never nothin' fast enough for you."

"I suppose I am impatient," admitted "Miss Lydyer," "but so would you be, too, if you had been cooped up for six long months in the city."

"And had a home like the Manor to go to," added the Captain, with a chuckle.

"It *is* lovely, isn't it?" she demanded, eagerly catching at his note of sympathy.

"The handsomest place on the river," asserted the Captain, with gratifying emphasis. "And so it ought ter be, with yo' Pa for its master. You know what I think of him. There ain't a finer man livin', I say."

The girl's eyes kindled.

"Dear papa!" she murmured softly. "What good taste you have, Captain!" she added, laughing gaily.

"Haven't I? Well, I'm rough, but I know a gentleman when I see him. Yo' Pa's a gentleman of the old sort. I wish there was more like him. They're getting scarce.

Some people call him a rustycrat. That don't hurt. If he's a rustycrat, why give me rustycrats, all the time! He don't put on enny airs like some o' these rich folks that ain't quite sure o' where they stand. Why, bless my heart, he makes as much o' me as if I was his ekal. And it's just the same with rich or po'. He can afford it—that's why. I'm a dimmycrat, and in a gener'l way o' speakin', I don't believe in puttin' one man above another, but we've got to have leaders, and I'm for leaders like yo' Pa, that have the *tone*, and can't be bullied or bought. The Colonel just hits it off: I'd foller him anywhere."

The Captain was a garrulous old chap, but Lydia knew he was sincere. He had been a great friend of hers since she was a tiny maid. She had often crossed the Bay with him, and always spent much of the time at the wheel-house window, or even beside him at the wheel itself, listening to his stories of storms and adventures. He had taught her to steer the vessel, and it was a special delight to her to be with him in a gale and watch him pilot the lumbering old Severn through a raging sea. There was a grim fearlessness in his weather-beaten face at such moments which she loved to see. It corresponded to her own youthful courage, which nothing, as yet, had ever daunted. She had learned to trust him absolutely and attached a greater importance to his opinions than his extremely limited range of information warranted. He was too clumsy as well as too honest to lie, but even if she had thought he was trying to please her with flattery of her father, she would have drunk it in almost as eagerly. Her father was her idol. And praise of him, even from coarser men than the Captain, was nothing new to her. There might be people who envied or disliked him as a "rustycrat," but she had never met them; she had been surrounded from infancy by an atmosphere of affection and regard for him which had impressed her with the feeling

that he was a kind of human pivot upon which everything turned.

He was, in fact, as Reeve had said to his son, a local autocrat, and as it happened, a popular one. As the head of one of the oldest families and the master of a large estate, he would, in any event, have wielded great influence. For generations, all classes had deferred to the owner of the Manor, with the feeling, originating far back in colonial times when, in the exercise of manorial privileges, he had really possessed exclusive authority and power, that he was their natural leader in public as well as in social affairs. His tenants and overseers, as well as the small farmers of the neighbourhood, the "poor whites," the negroes—all looked to the Colonel for guidance and help. Even those who felt that their individuality and liberty of action were more or less dominated and repressed, found it difficult to rid themselves of a sense of docility towards one whom they had been taught, as children, to respect.

As the Colonel's daughter, Lydia had always been used to treatment which had naturally given her a keen sense of her social importance. There was a spice of haughtiness in her manner to those who seemed inclined to be presuming. It vanished quickly with the cause of offence. There was but one individual towards whom her manner was always distant and repelling. She could never force herself to be other than coldly polite to her father's man of business—Lawyer Reeve. He had a way of looking at her, as though he would be familiar if he dared, that always stirred her with a sense of repugnance. There was a veiled insolence in his manner that sometimes caused her disquiet and even alarm. What could it mean? She could not fathom it. All she knew was that she disliked and shrunk from him. She fancied it was because he was such a "common" man.

Oswald had remained close at hand during Lydia's con-

versation with the Captain. He had no intention of eavesdropping. He lingered only to watch the play of animation on her mobile face, to hear the soft notes of her fresh young voice. He envied the Captain the flash of those brilliant eyes, the roguish smile of that perfect little mouth, the flush of rose colour his praise of her father had brought into her cheeks. And she had not even so much as noticed *him*. Not once had her glances travelled his way. He actually felt a kind of jealousy of her dog. Happy brute, to have felt the soft caress of her hand! Oswald pulled himself together with an exclamation of annoyance. Was he a mere callow boy to be thus affected by a pretty face? He had had any number of affairs with women, and rather plumed himself upon being unimpressionable. All the same, he was conscious of a strong desire to meet this girl, to talk with her, to discover, if he could, the secret of her extraordinary charm. What folly! Was he not the son of Lawyer Reeve, her father's very humble servant and handy tool? The distance between them was not immeasurable, but it was great. To seek association with her was to court the humiliations he dreaded. A mere acquaintance might be easily obtained, but beyond that—nothing, or worse than nothing, the galling slights which the least presumption on his part would inevitably bring upon him. It was a bitter thought.

Turning hastily, he began to pace up and down the deck, excited by a conflict of feelings. If he could but have met her somewhere else, under other conditions! If only she were not a Cheston and he not a Reeve! Yes, he might have had a chance, though in spite of uniform success with her sex, he was not so sure. There was something undefinable about her which caused him an unaccustomed sense of timidity, of doubt. Was it merely because she was a Cheston? For the first time in his varied experience of women, he felt

that he was in the presence of a power with which he might not be able to cope. And yet, she was little more than a child,—an unformed young creature who, probably, was still at school. But there was that in her glance that might always keep him in check. He could fancy her holding herself above him—superior, scornful, aloof.

Pshaw! Why bother about what might be? She was as far away from him as the moon. One could see at a glance that she was a perfect specimen of her class. All its prejudices, doubtless, were ingrained in her. And even if he could establish some claim to her regard, there was her father to be reckoned with, and beyond him, the rigours of a caste. No, his common sense told him it were better if he never met her at all. None the less, he felt it would be a privilege merely to hear a word of greeting from her, to meet, if but once, the gaze of those eyes.

Almost before he knew it, the thing had happened. A sudden cry caused him to look round. Lydia had left the wheel-house, and was bending over the guard-rail, gazing down into the bow. Oswald hurried forward, and following the direction of her glances, beheld her setter tearing viciously at a boy who was floundering on the deck below, near the heels of a huge Durham bull. The latter, tied by the horns to a cross-beam, was writhing and bellowing madly. Lydia called sharply to Rover, but he took no heed. In his fury, he thought only of throttling his prey. The boy, wild with terror, was yelling at the top of his voice. Lydia began to be alarmed. Rover was fierce when roused, and he might maim the boy or even kill him. After a moment's hesitation, she turned and hastened towards the companion-way, fearful lest she should not reach the scene in time to pull Rover off before he had inflicted some grievous hurt. Oswald, following, caught up with her and raised his hat.

"May I help you?" he asked.

"Thank you very much," she said, looking at him frankly, but in some surprise. She had not been conscious of his presence near her. Evidently, he knew what had occurred. "My dog seems to be beside himself. I can't imagine what the boy could have done to him."

A moment later, they had reached the lower deck and were threading their way through a dark, narrow passage toward the bow. Lydia had taken the lead and moved so rapidly that she was several paces in advance of Oswald. She had just descended the steps passing over the shaft when Oswald, glancing ahead of her, saw, barring her path, the huge bulk of the bull. The brute had broken his fastenings and dashed into the passage. The glare from the furnace pit had checked him for a moment. Frightened by it, he stood irresolute, his eyes gleaming fiercely, his mouth a lather of foam. Emerging from the obscurity of the passage, Lydia was revealed to him suddenly in the bright red glow. She was still advancing at the same quick gait, when the bull, with a snort of rage, tossed his head and bent low, as if about to charge upon her. Oswald gave a cry of alarm and called to her to stop. She checked herself instantly, and seeing the bull for the first time, stood, rigid, uncertain what to do.

Oswald noticed an open door to the right of her.

"This way!" he cried, desperately, as he reached her side. "Quick!"

She turned instinctively towards him. As she did so, the bull gave a leap forward. Oswald did not wait to ask leave, but, seizing her about the waist, thrust her swiftly into a room used for stowing small articles of freight. Fortunately, it was empty. They had barely crossed the threshold, when the bull dashed by. An instant later, there was a loud crash, followed by shrieks of terror in the saloon. Lydia shivered, but Oswald drew a deep sigh of relief. He cared not what happened there. Thank God, she was safe! But for him,

she might now have been at the maddened beast's mercy, to be tossed upon his horns or trampled under his ponderous hoofs. At this thought, he, also, shivered. Was it providence or mere blind chance that had brought him to her just in time? Him of all men? At any rate, it was a happy accident, for which he blessed his lucky star.

"How can I thank you?" she asked softly, glancing at him with startled eyes in which her native courage was struggling to reassert itself. "And who am I to thank?" There was a note of humor in her voice as she asked the question. It seemed whimsical to her that he had, perhaps, saved her life and she did not even know him.

Oswald winced; the question hurt him. It brought him suddenly back to the chill reality of his position. Must he tell her, now, in the first moment of their meeting, in the first glow of her gratitude to him?

"I am Lydia Cheston," she added quickly, without noticing his hesitation. "You may have heard of my father, Colonel Cheston."

"Yes, often," said Oswald in a stifled voice, a humming in his ears. He had quite lost his self-possession. All his usual ease and confidence had vanished. A dozen silly speeches rushed to his lips, but he said nothing. There was but one thing to be said. He must tell her he was his father's son. But might not there be some way of telling her that would disarm or mitigate her feeling? Of course, she could think only meanly of him when she knew. No; his ingenuity in coining phrases, which had so often enabled him to extricate himself from false positions, was of no use here. There was no form of words that would hide the bald truth from her. She knew his father, and on the instant, would stab him with a keen glance of recognition of the social difference between them. Well, the sooner it were over with, the better.

"I am Oswald Reeve," he said at last, "I think you know my father—he is often at the Manor."

Lydia gave a little gasp of surprise, and gazed at him questioningly; she was really not sure she had heard aright. Lawyer Reeve's son? Why, he seemed to be a gentleman! At the first glance, she had felt quite sure as to that. But stop! there was a story that Reeve had the curious whim of *making* a gentleman of his son. She remembered now. It had once or twice been a subject of amused discussion at the Manor and of speculation as to the ultimate result. And in a recent letter from home, something was said of young Reeve's expected return from Europe after an absence of several years. Yes, it must be. Young as she was, she divined his embarrassment, and pitied him. Her pride of class was intense, but her generosity was stronger. She thought only of his mortification at having had to confess himself to her, and of what she owed him.

She offered him her hand, rather shyly, as if she were not quite sure it was the right thing to do, and said, with a smile of winning friendliness it was impossible to doubt,

"Yes, I know your father; Papa thinks a great deal of him. When he learns what you have done for me, he will hasten to thank you. I'm sure he won't be able to do enough for you."

Oswald breathed more freely. Her words and the tone in which they were uttered brightened the prospect wonderfully. It seemed to him they were intended to reassure him, to promise him considerate treatment at her father's hands. At least, it was evident she meant to be kind. There was no trace of condescension in her manner. Whatever her thoughts might be, she had no idea of showing him the least discourtesy. Her attitude placed him at once upon an equal footing. He knew that he had won her regard, and it needed but a glance at her earnest, candid eyes to convince him

that it was a feeling which might even stand the test of the social prejudice he had so much feared.

"Do you think we can venture out?" she asked, peering into the passage. As she spoke, she saw the bull being dragged along by a group of men tugging at a rope about his head, while others goaded him in the flanks. He had been secured only after a hard struggle in which chairs and tables had been overturned amid general chaos in the saloon. Women had fainted, men had sworn themselves hoarse, but no one had been hurt, except some of the deck hands who had rushed to the rescue, and these had escaped with bruises and a grazing scratch or two from the animal's horns. Lydia and Oswald watched the bull's slow progress towards the bow, and when the procession had at last disappeared, she exclaimed:

"Come, Mr. Reeve; I hope the boy is not much hurt."

As they stepped into the passage, Rover bounded into view, and behind him, showed the grimy face of the boy. On seeing his mistress, Rover crouched to the ground and crept towards her with a shamefaced, penitent air.

"You naughty fellow!" cried Lydia. "What have you done?"

"Jes' chawed me orful, thet's all," exclaimed a sullen voice.

Rover's late antagonist was following close in his wake, armed with a heavy club. He was a stolid-looking urchin, clad in gray kersey, with copper-tipped shoes. His chubby face was smeared with blood and dirt; his clothes were torn in several places. He ducked his tow head threateningly at Rover, and brandished his club. Evidently, he was athirst for revenge.

"Why did he attack you?" asked Lydia, relieved to find he had suffered no serious harm.

"'Cos he's wicious—thet's why. I wasn't doin' nothin'

to him. I seed him up on the deck, but never thought he'd take notice o' me."

"What *were* you doing?" asked Lydia, with a certain peremptoriness. She was convinced the little rascal had excited Rover's wrath in some way; he was, by nature, a peaceable dog.

"Only teasin' the bull," said the boy, with unblushing candour. "I thought I'd have a little fun pokin' him with a stick en' makin' him rare en' beller. It seemed to make yo' dog mad. But what had he to do with it? It wusn't enny bizness o' his'n. He pounced on me en' nearly tore me up. But I got clare uv him at last en' meant to beat him good."

"Oh, you did? And you call it fun to worry a helpless animal?" There was indignation in her voice, and her dark eyes sparkled angrily. "I'm glad Rover punished you. Did he really bite you?"

"Bite me!" gasped the boy, amazed at her pretence of incredulity, "ef you don't believe me, I'll show you. He tuk a piece out'n one of my legs." As he spoke, he stooped to roll up his trousers.

"Oh, I believe you!" said Lydia, hastily, with a smothered laugh.

"Thet ain't all," continued the complainant, dolefully. "He's ruined my Sunday suit. I'm in fur a lickin' when I get home. Pap said he'd thrash me good ef I got it spiled."

"Really?" exclaimed Lydia, her eyes brimming with fun. "That would be too hard. Here's something to help you buy new clothes." Diving into one of her pockets, she produced several silver coins. "Perhaps I can help you about the 'licking,' too. Where do you live?"

"In Hornsby's Neck."

"Why, that's quite near my home—the Manor. Tell your father Miss Lydia Cheston, Colonel Cheston's daughter,

said she would be greatly obliged to him if he wouldn't thrash you this time."

"Oh Lordy!" exclaimed the boy, aghast; "I'm in fur it, sho'. Pap's name is 'Zekel Giles—he's one of yo' par's renters. I thought I'd seed you befo'. He'll feel obleeged to whale me, now, fur gettin' into a muss with you."

"Not if he knows I do not wish it," she asserted, with a confident smile. "But you must promise not to be so cruel again."

"Cruel?" said the boy, gazing at her in half-derisive surprise, but with a certain rude deference. "T'ain't enny harm ter punch a bull. They're onnery beasts, en' 'ud horn you in a minnit."

Lydia turned from him to hide her amusement. It were idle to endeavour to proselytise him. A bull, in his eyes, was lawful game, and worrying any dangerous beast was a perfectly proper pastime. She knew the type of coarse country humourists so well.

"If you like, Mr. Reeve," she said, "we'll go on deck. I'm anxious to catch the first glimpse of the Manor landmark—a clump of tall pines."

CHAPTER III

When they reached the deck, they found it shrouded in fog. The sun was still shining overhead, yet all about the vessel lay darkness so dense that objects could not be distinguished fifty yards away. Every few seconds, the clang of a lighthouse bell and the screech of whistles from vessels creeping carefully along alternated with the deep-throated roar of a great ocean steamer straight ahead. All at once, the smokestack and masts of the latter loomed high in air, and then sank to their proper level, close at hand. The yards showed vaguely next, and then the deck, with misty shapes upon it, and finally, the long black hull, with the British ensign floating red and blue from the stern. A few fathoms farther on, the Severn suddenly glided into open space again, and all ahead was brilliantly clear. The Bay was dotted with sailing craft of various types, from great ships to mere midges of canoes, with all their canvas bent. Close on the starboard bow, a schooner was dashing along, her sails vermilion in the morning sun. The Bay was now of an indigo tint; the sky pale blue, flecked with fleecy clouds. Far away to the left, stretched a line of shore faint violet in tone; to the right, a dark mass of woods above which rose the feathery crowns of a group of pines.

Lydia's face grew radiant at sight of them. "The pines at last!" she exclaimed, "we are entering the river!"

The river, like most of the tributaries of the Chesapeake, was very broad at its mouth, and for some distance above it. Its banks rose gently on each side to rolling uplands, broken by valleys and ravines. Forests and cleared land showed, like colours on a map, in tracts of varying extent. The

fields were dappled with the subdued yet strongly contrasted tints of early spring—the chocolates, grays, faint purples of freshly ploughed mould; the drabs and russets of pasture and stubble; the velvety green of wheat-fields, and, occasionally, the soft pink of a peach orchard in full bloom. Set close to the water's edge, as a rule, old colonial houses gleamed, red or white or yellow, among clumps of budding trees, and scattered near them were the hip-roofed dwellings of tenants or overseers; the brick or wooden "quarters" of the slaves, and more remote but still with evident relation to the "big house," the quaint log cabins, plastered over with clay, of negro or "poor white" dependents of the place.

Rounding a headland, the steamer came in sight of a long wharf jutting out from the base of a green bluff down which wound a road white with oyster-shells which, by long usage, had been ground into dust. On the crest of the bluff were perched a few whitewashed houses—the homes chiefly of fishermen—shaded by large weeping willows and elms. The wharf was black with people. The whole countryside was in a ferment over the outbreak of hostilities between the two great sections of the country—the North and the South—and there was eager curiosity to hear the news the steamer would bring from Baltimore. Fort Sumter had fallen but a few days before; something even more momentous might happen at any time. People had flocked to the wharf from many miles around.

The tidings brought by the steamer were, indeed, of serious import. On the previous day—the 19th of April, 1861—there had been a riot in Baltimore caused by the passage through the city of detachments of Northern troops on their way to Washington. The first blood of the struggle had been spilled. What would happen next, no one could foretell. For the present, the way was blocked to the passage of the Union forces. The Secessionist element in Baltimore

was flushed with triumph. The withdrawal of Maryland from the Union seemed almost assured.

Throughout the Tidewater region, the sympathy with the seceding states was intense. Secession had not been popular there, but the impression had got abroad, that an attempt was being made to coerce the South by force of arms. This idea roused the passions of the slaveholding communities. Their interests were thought to be identified with those of the states that had "gone out." The example of Virginia appealed most strongly to her neighbours across the Potomac, and along the shores of Chesapeake Bay. The Tidewater regions of the two states were knit close together by long association and intercourse and the similarity of their economic and social institutions. The planters in each had much in common, and were animated by substantially the same ideas. They had stood together from early times. As colonists, they had stubbornly resisted the attempts of Cromwell's commissioners to reduce the two "plantations" as hot-beds of malignants. In the Revolution, they had fought side by side, with equal valour, on many a bloody field. The instinct of habit, of kinship, of traditional intimacy, as well as of self-preservation, naturally impelled a people who regarded slavery as the keystone of their social fabric and their Virginia neighbours as their natural allies to make common cause against a foe that seemed to threaten both.

Lydia was in a fever of impatience as the Severn crept, like a snail, as it seemed to her, towards the wharf. When, at last, she was near enough to scan the upturned faces, she leaned over the guard-rail, passing each in quick review in the hope of discovering someone from the Manor. Oswald, standing close at her side, amused himself by noting the different types in the motley gathering. They were all there, it seemed to him, as he recalled the various impres-

sions of his boyhood—the dapper swell of the plantation in riding suit of velveteen or corduroy; the "genteel" lawyer or doctor in professional black; the affable tradesman from the county town in more or less seedy garb; the loutish overseer or tenant in gray kersey; the "poor white," a thing of shreds and patches, and finally the negroes, slave and free, young and old, of both sexes and of all conditions, from the spruce "body servant" or coachman of some wealthy planter, and the comfortable-looking old "aunty" in a linsey-woolsey gown of blue and yellow and gaudy turban of many colours, to nondescript loungers and laughing pickaninnies. These last, bareheaded and barefooted, bright-eyed and eager for mischief or a chance of earning a penny, were dodging in and out among the throng, or sat, basking in the sun, along the edges of the wharf, their legs dangling over the side.

Lydia was about to turn away, disappointed, when her face suddenly lit up and she gave a low cry of satisfaction.

"Uncle Cæsar!" she exclaimed, stretching eagerly forward.

An old negro, who was standing near a pile at a corner of the wharf, glanced up, and doffing a huge hat of white felt, made her a low bow. He was an imposing figure—very tall, very black, with regular features and a clean-shaven face projecting from a portentous collar about which was wound a somewhat threadbare cravat of black silk. He held himself very stiff, with a grave dignity of manner which discouraged familiarity. One could see, at a glance, that he considered himself a person of assured standing and importance.

"Miss Lydyer!" he exclaimed, surprised and apparently somewhat disconcerted. "Sobbun (servant) Miss."

"He's the gardener at the Manor," explained Lydia to Oswald, laughing. "Isn't he formidable? He's the only

person at home of whom I'm afraid. He used to threaten me with a huge pair of shears when I trampled on his flower-beds, and I've never quite got over my dread of him. He was the overseer, long ago, and still fancies he's a power. Papa says it's a pity to disturb his illusion, and lets him do pretty much as he pleases. He quite lords it over me—as you will see."

Oswald was disposed to doubt this; he fancied she could hold her own even with this grim old fellow.

Meanwhile, Cæsar was busy speculating as to the cause of the unlooked-for appearance of "Young Miss," as the negroes called Lydia to distinguish her from "Ole Miss," her grandmother, and from her mother, "Miss Flo'r."

"What she doin' on de boat, I wonder," he muttered; "she's got no bizness, dah. We all thought her safe at school in Balt'mer. Marster said, only dis mornin', she wan't comin' tell de fust uv June. One uv her mischeevous tricks, I'll be boun'!"

He was really glad to see her, but he instinctively resolved to give no indication of the fact—if he could help it. Ever since she had been big enough to run about, he had been struggling to make head against her. In spite of himself, she had captivated him, but he was too stubborn to make an open submission. He even sought to assert his independence at times by finding fault with and scolding her, but the subterfuge was, after all, a hollow sham which deceived neither him nor her. He would sulkily have let her trample on him.

"How did ye come hyar?" he demanded, gruffly, as Lydia turned again to him, "I hope you ain't sick." There was a touch of anxiety in his voice in spite of his effort to appear indifferent.

"No, indeed!" she answered blithely. "And all at home?"

"'Bout ez uzuel. Yo' Mar's kind o' po'ly—but noways ill," he added, noting a quick look of alarm in her face; "jes' not so peart ez she mought be."

"You came in the carriage?"

Cæsar drew himself up still more stiffly, and looked embarrassed.

"No, Miss—in en ox-kyart," he answered slowly, with evident unwillingness, and fidgeting nervously with his hat. He was sure Young Miss would tease him about the ox-cart. She knew what a "come down" it was for him, who considered it beneath his dignity to ride abroad except on horseback or as driver of Ole Miss's coach. His pride was at stake, and he dreaded her laughter.

"Marster axed me to fotch some things he wuz werry pertickler about," he explained, with an air of importance that, he hoped, might impress her. "He didn't want ter trust 'em to keerless han's."

"An ox-cart!" cried Lydia, her eyes shining with mischief. "That would be such fun. You can find room for me, Uncle Cæsar?"

Cæsar glanced at her with an air of stern reproof. This was worse than being made game of. The idea of Young Miss being seen on the roads in such a "common" conveyance! It was all very well at home—she might ride in anything there, and as a matter of fact, she had tried every species of locomotion that could be found or invented—but on the public roads, with this crowd swarming by! What had come over her? And that young gentleman standing beside her—what would he think? Cæsar laid even greater store by the family dignity than by his own. His dignity, in fact, was part and parcel of the family state. "Hit's dat schoolin' off hyondah," was his instant conclusion. "I allers said hit wouldn't do her enny good. I ain't gwine ter 'low enny foolishness like dat."

But he knew very well he would be helpless to prevent it. He had had many a bout with Young Miss, and had always been quickly routed; she either coaxed or teased him into surly compliance. His only hope lay in flight.

"I've a great min' to drive off en' leave her," he muttered. "But no," after a moment's reflection, "Marster would rake me fur lettin' her get home by herself, en' she'd give me no peace fur a week!"

He glanced appealingly at Oswald, as if to ask him to come to his relief, and his brow cleared as he heard him say to Lydia:

"I've no doubt I can find you a carriage, if you will permit me."

Cæsar gave him an approving nod. He would not have done so had he recognised in him the son of Lawyer Reeve, whom he held in contempt as "po' trash," and hated because he had been instrumental in displacing him as overseer. But he did not dream that Oswald was in the least objectionable. He flattered himself as to his ability to tell "de Quality" at a glance, and Oswald seemed to him to be a very elegant young gentleman, indeed. Very probably, he was an acquaintance Young Miss had made in the city, or perhaps, a friend of her brother, "Marse Turlo," on his way to pay a visit at the Manor.

"Thank you, no," said Lydia quickly, to Cæsar's keen disappointment, "I shall really enjoy the ride in the ox-cart. It's something I haven't done for months. And it will be so amusing to watch Uncle Cæsar. Don't you see how shocked he is? It's such a treat to tease him again. I'll be down in a moment, Uncle Cæsar," she cried to the discomfited old man, "I'll mind the oxen while you get the things for Papa."

Cæsar smothered an oath and turned away in disgust. Well, if she *would* do it, he could at least make her feel his

displeasure on the way. The prospect of a good spell of grumbling—and there was no keener enjoyment for him—consoled him somewhat.

As Lydia and Oswald left the steamer, they brushed past a tall young planter who was in the act of going on board. Glancing round at them, he halted in astonishment, and offering a hand to each, greeted them cordially by their first names.

"I didn't expect to see either of you here!" he exclaimed.

His frank, honest gaze rested affectionately upon Lydia, and then, for a moment, kindly upon Oswald, but shifted almost instantly to Lydia again. Lydia and he were great friends. Oswald, years ago, had been his protégé as a younger boy at college, and there was a strong bond of affection between them. Oswald was glad to see him for reasons other than their college intimacy. Basil Kent belonged to the class he wished to enter. He had been very kind to him at college, and Oswald hoped he might be even kinder here. But he was not sure. Basil might have changed, and they were no longer at college, but in a far different atmosphere.

The two young men were in strong contrast as they stood facing each other. Basil Kent was dark and lean, with bold, rather prominent, features and a somewhat angular, strongly-built frame. He had none of Oswald's grace and ease of carriage. His manner, though self-possessed, lacked finish. Beside Oswald's fine regularity of feature, his rugged face was almost homely. It had, however, something that Oswald's countenance lacked—the stamp of power. A keen intelligence gleamed in the clear gray eyes; the square jaw and aquiline profile betokened a resolute will. The impression one received was that of restless energy held well in hand.

Lydia looked upon Basil as an elder brother, much closer

to her in sympathy, far more to be relied upon, than her real brother, Turlo, who was but a careless fellow. He lived with his father on a plantation adjoining the Manor, and had been Lydia's chosen friend and confidant since she could first remember. Her earliest impressions were of a tall, stalwart lad who carried her about on his shoulder, romped with her in the garden or the garret, and submitted meekly to all her whims. It was he who had taught her to ride, to sail a canoe. Like herself, he was fond of out-door life. There was the kinship between them of an ardent sympathy with nature. She loved him as a dear comrade who was always ready to share her special tastes, whose greatest pleasure it seemed to be to contribute to her enjoyment. Her eyes shone softly as she returned his greeting. How glad she was he happened to be there to meet her!

CHAPTER IV

Basil turned back and accompanied them to the spot where Uncle Cæsar stood waiting in an attitude of rigid protest.

"What brought you back so soon, Lydia?" he asked.

"I ran away," she said, demurely, "I couldn't stand it any longer, Basil. Spring had come; the trees in the streets were putting out their leaves—poor, half-starved things—and I thought of all that was happening at the Manor. Last night, I lost control of myself; I felt as if I had a fever; perhaps I had; at any rate, I had but one thought—to get away. I knew if I spoke to Aunts, there would be a scene; they would have tried to detain me; perhaps"—here she laughed merrily—"they might even have ventured to lock me up! Poor dears—imagine their horror when they came down to breakfast this morning to find me gone! But I left them a note explaining I was on my way home. It was easy to slip out of the house and make my way to the steamer, with Rover for my protector. I thought I had reached the wharf only just in time, but there was a riot in Baltimore yesterday, and the Severn was delayed until this morning. Captain Grimes gave me a stateroom, and old Eliza, the chambermaid, slept outside my door, so I was safe enough. Now, don't say a word. I know what you think. Yes, I *was* inconsiderate of Aunts, and rash and all that, but if you had felt as I did, you'd have done the same. Don't tell me you wouldn't; I'm not to blame for breaking out of jail."

"I don't blame you," said Basil, smiling.

Blame her? How could he, or how could anyone who

knew her? Until her departure for Baltimore in the previous autumn, she had led a life of such freedom at the Manor that Basil had feared that, in the city, with its unaccustomed confinement, its petty restraints, she would fret like a bird beating its wings against a cage. Her father, her mother, her grandmother had shared his apprehensions. They had permitted her to develop naturally, with only such training as their ideas of propriety demanded, and found delight in her overflowing vitality, her freedom from affectations, her proud self-reliance. "She is no hothouse plant," Ole Miss had once exclaimed, with a keen sense of sympathy, for she, in her girlhood, had been quite as independent and high-strung, and she wished Lydia to grow up as strong and vigorous and as free from the little weaknesses of her sex as her own capable womanhood had proved to be. When members of the family suggested that Lydia was being "spoiled" by too much indulgence, her tart answer was, "Pshaw! let her be; there is plenty of time yet to prune her. It is you who would spoil her if you tried to bend her to your ways. There is no harm in her, and life will tame her soon enough."

As she grew towards womanhood, however, it had been deemed expedient that Lydia should receive some final touches to the education obtained from an English governess, and Ole Miss had consented reluctantly to the urging of her two maiden daughters in Baltimore that Lydia should spend a winter with them in order to attend a school which they recommended. Basil knew them well—those aunts. They were prim old maids whose establishment was a model of neatness and decorum. They had chosen to live in Baltimore, on annuities from the Manor, because they disliked the inconveniences of country life. What they loved was snug corners, a quiet routine, and the mild distractions of regular "church work." Ole Miss often thought of them

with a kind of dismay. They had nothing in common with the rest of the family, including herself. She was a Cheston by birth as well as by marriage, a cousin of her late husband, the Judge, and her daughters should have had a double share of the family spirit, which was hardy, resolute, with a dash of lawlessness in it. How did it happen that they were such timid, order-loving creatures? Really, they were scarcely safe associates for her granddaughter! The old lady actually felt a half-humorous sense of apprehension lest they should inoculate Lydia with their mischievously tepid ideas and even make a proselyte of her. Basil had been a frequent visitor at their house and had always felt a sense of oppression in the little bandbox of a place, on a narrow, retired street. He had often itched to pull a chair or a table from its place, and create some human disorder that would give it a habitable look. No wonder Lydia thought it a jail. He marvelled she had endured it as long as she had done. No, he could not blame her for yielding to a sudden impulse and breaking away, but what a risk she had run! Her route to the steamer, at night, passed over the scene of the riot of a few hours before, the details of which he had just heard. Thank Heaven, she had escaped unharmed by any of the remnants of the mob. Apparently, she had not been molested at all; it was evident she had no idea of the danger of her adventure.

"I came in my canoe," he said. "Will you go back with me? There's a good breeze; we can reach the Manor in half an hour."

"Of course!" cried Lydia, delighted.

Old Cæsar gave a low chuckle.

"Dat fotch her," he exclaimed under his breath; "en ox-kyart's nuthin' to a cunner wid her. Dat gives her wings, en' she'd allers like to be flyin'. Bless God fur bringin' Marse Basil in de nick o' time!"

"You needn't wait, Uncle Cæsar," she said, turning to him with a mock air of regret, "I'm so sorry to disappoint you, but we'll have the ox-cart some other day."

"Not ef I kin holp it," he muttered, marching off promptly for fear she might change her mind.

"Excuse me a minute," said Basil, "I must speak to Captain Grimes. You're not going yet, Oswald?"

"No; if I may wait," answered Oswald, with a glance at Lydia. He was grateful to Basil for his implied suggestion; it seemed to him to indicate that Basil found nothing strange in his association with Colonel Cheston's daughter. Lydia turned to him when Basil had gone, and began to chat gaily of the people about them.

"It's so good to see them all once more, Mr. Reeve," she exclaimed. "I know most of the faces; even people I never spoke to seem like old friends. It is so different in a large city, where you meet only strangers; I was dreadfully lonesome there."

Oswald found her trifling confidences delightful, but he was ill at ease. At any moment, his father might appear. It was a craven fear, he told himself, but he could imagine the curve of Lydia's haughty mouth at sight of him, and he hoped this would be spared him. Would his father have the good sense to keep out of the way? He was greatly relieved when Basil returned, and there was still no sign of the figure in shiny black.

Oswald was mistaken in assuming that Basil accepted his presence with Lydia without question. He had been puzzled from the first. As he now drew near, he glanced at them curiously. How had it happened that they had met? What would the Colonel say? They seemed to be on very good terms; would the friendship extend beyond the doors of the Manor? Basil knew the nature of the Colonel's feelings towards Oswald's father. Unconsciously, perhaps, he

showed his negligent regard of him more plainly than was considerate. It had probably never occurred to him that Reeve expected or desired any different treatment. His social aspirations were known to everybody, but the Colonel had never taken them seriously; certainly, he could not be expected to receive as his equal the son of his father's overseer!

Basil felt a keen sympathy for Oswald; there might be rough trials ahead for him. It was all absurd, of course, this pride of caste, where a well-bred, attractive young fellow like Oswald was in question, but precisely because there was no reason in it, it would be all the harder to combat. And liberal-minded though he was, he, himself, felt a thrill of repugnance at the thought of Lydia associating with the son of "Lawyer Reeve," even though he had found him a charming lad at college and beheld in him, now, a fine, manly fellow with a grace of manner which he sorely envied. Had it been any one but Lydia, would he have cared? He told himself he was not exempt from the class prejudice he condemned in others, but, perhaps, it was merely a twinge of jealousy of which, as yet, he was unconscious. He was more sensitive than he knew, where Lydia was concerned.

"I'm ready, Lydia," he said, moving to one side of the wharf where his canoe lay moored. Leaping down into the bow, he began to unfurl the sail. There was a rickety ladder reaching from the edge of the wharf to the stern, and Oswald, going first, offered Lydia his hand. When she had descended, he stood ready to push off the long, slender craft, sharp at each end, and lying in the water as light as a cork. Crouching on the wharf, lay Rover, gazing down at his mistress with anxious eyes, as if fearing to be left behind.

"Now, Rover!" said Lydia, with a gay laugh.

The setter sprang up eagerly, and leaped into the waist at her feet.

"Cast off, Oswald," cried Basil, easing his sheet to the wind.

Oswald gave the canoe a strong push, and the sail catching the breeze, she darted off like a bird.

"*Au revoir*, Mr. Reeve," Lydia called out brightly, with a wave of her hand.

"*Au revoir*," said Oswald, bowing.

Was it really *au revoir* or farewell? Would he ever meet her again on the same friendly terms? Ascending to the wharf, he watched the swiftly receding boat, until it had become a mere speck upon the river. He had had a glimpse of romance; with a sigh, he turned away to face reality once more. As he did so, he felt a touch upon his shoulder. His father was beside him. It was reality, indeed!

"I kept out of sight," said Mr. Reeve, evidently thinking he had done something highly creditable, and confident of his son's approval. "I didn't want to spoil your game, my boy. But how did you contrive to scrape acquaintance with her? I never thought you'd manage it so quickly."

"I didn't manage it;" answered Oswald, shortly, "it was an accident." He could not bear to discuss Lydia Cheston with his father. But he was not unappreciative. His father had acted with a consideration he had not expected. For his sake, he had effaced himself. It were too much to ask of him that he contract the habit of doing so, but his conduct was distinctly encouraging. Oswald began to hope they might get on together, in some sort of fashion, after all.

CHAPTER V

THE canoe sped along before a stiff side wind. Its swift, buoyant motion sent the blood tingling through Lydia's veins. It was her duty to steer, while Basil shifted sail. She held the tiller firmly, with a keen sense of power. The capricious little craft seemed a live thing under her, to be watched and humoured, lest it play her some prank. Every now and then, it shied or bounded forward, like a mettlesome colt.

Basil had but little to do with sheet or jib, and occupied himself chiefly with watching Lydia as she sat, flushed and eager, plying him with questions as to what was happening at the Manor. It was interesting to note the changes that six months had wrought in her. They seemed at first to be but slight. Apparently, she was the same bright, laughing child he had always known. But as he studied her, he saw that, in some things, she was different. Her delicate features, for example, were more firmly limned. There was greater expressiveness in her face, a new light in her eyes. Her figure showed rounder, more graceful lines. It was as though a sketch had been filled in, with a touch here and there, so that now it was a picture almost finished. She had reached the boundaries of adolescence; the child was becoming a woman.

The discovery disturbed him. He had never thought of her except as a child. She loved him as a child, with no reserve, no scrutiny. Her affection was a matter of habit. It sprang from long association and mutuality of tastes. What would happen when she regarded him with a woman's eyes?

Basil knew very well that he was not a favourite with her sex. Most women, in fact, regarded him as a dull, "slow" fellow. He was reserved and rather shy, with the diffidence natural to a serious temperament. He had been a close student at college, and, since his return home, had been absorbed in the management of his father's estate. Unconsciously, he had grown to be almost as much of a recluse as his father, a book-worm, who seldom stirred from home. A natural disinclination for society gained upon him. He gradually became impatient of its demands. Whatever drew him away from his favourite occupations was apt to be a source of annoyance. When, by any chance, he found himself in a company of young people, he was ill at ease. Women found it difficult to make him talk. It was rather aggravating for them, because, among men, he had the reputation of being clever. Conscious of his social inefficiency, he made strenuous efforts, now and then, to overcome it, but his essays seemed to him to be absurdly clumsy and abortive. He often envied men, whom he knew to be fools, their gift of light and amusing small-talk. He was embarrassed by a queer conscientiousness. He could seldom bring himself to say a thing unless it seemed worth saying; and then, it always sounded, to his ears, forced and stilted. He usually ended by hurrying home from a social gathering with a keen sense of relief.

It was only at the Manor that he showed himself as he really was. He had been on a familiar footing there since childhood, and talked and acted as freely as at home, especially when Lydia and he were alone together. He was never at a loss for words with her. They had always had so much in common. There was even a deeper note in the love he shared with her for the fields and woods. Lydia's feeling was merely instinctive; his had been broadened and made more vivid by his mode of life. He was a hard-

working fellow, and for years, had carried the whole burden of his father's affairs which, at one time, had been seriously compromised. There were moments when it was delicious to wander idly in a wood, gradually losing all sense of care. His tired mind revived in keen enjoyment of its solitude, its silence, its profound repose. He drank in eagerly the pungent fragrance of the pines, the fresh smell of the earth, the perfume of the honeysuckle, or of wild grape or cherry blossoms. No wood, however remote, was lonesome for him. The stillness grew vocal if one stepped softly. The chirp of crickets, the humming of bees, the warbling or the conversational twitter of birds, the rustle of rabbit or fox in the undergrowth—all spoke to him of a companionship, shy and yet familiar, that seemed to bring him into communion with Nature in her truest forms. Life was all about him, yet life inarticulate, subdued, unobtrusive, which made no demands upon him and harmonised perfectly with his mood. There were no artificial exactions here; no arbitrary standards to which he must conform. Life in the woods was natural, free, unrestrained. The birds and rabbits and squirrels commented upon him among themselves, perhaps, but their criticisms were unintelligible to him and he need not care if they found him dull.

When Lydia shared these excursions, his pleasure was of a different sort and even keener. She had always exerted a strong influence over him. As a mere child, she had had the power of drawing him out of himself, of almost making another man of him. He lost his self-consciousness, his sense of awkwardness; it was as though a weight had been lifted from him and he was free to enjoy. It was impossible to be serious with her or incommunicative. It was only when others shared their companionship that he relapsed into fits of taciturnity and shyness, and, even then, she often coaxed him out of his

reserve. Her power was greatest when they wandered together over the country on horseback or afoot. Then, it seemed to him, she was all his own. Her joyous enthusiasm affected him with a refreshing sense of the brightness and gaiety and buoyancy of life. In her graceful wildness, her innocent abandon, she seemed a perfect creature of the woods. At times, he could fancy her a laughter-loving dryad, who had fallen asleep long ages ago and had suddenly wakened into life again to lure him into a delightful paganism. And an expedition with her was sure to have its adventures and surprises. She loved danger for its own sake, and was not to be deterred by any obstacles. Many a time, he had risked his neck or taken the chance of broken bones because she chose to attempt some hazardous feat or sheer piece of folly. When she got into trouble, she turned to him coolly to extricate her, in perfect confidence that he would not fail her. She trusted him implicitly, and looked to him always for sympathy and help. Whatever others might think of him, *she* never thought him "slow" or dull.

But now that she was no longer a child, would she continue to be blind to his shortcomings? Might not she, too, come to weigh him by the ordinary standards of her sex? It would be only natural, if, as a woman, she asked of him what he feared he could not give, the ability to please, to amuse, to jest, among other people, in the social atmosphere that always chilled him. She was beautiful, and would be admired and courted. Their old, unrestricted intimacy would be possible no longer. At the thought, a fierce desire to keep her for himself thrilled him with the dawning sense of passion. He looked at her again and understood. It was no longer the child in her that he loved, but the woman.

He drew a deep breath, startled. She was very lovely—

he had never realised how lovely before. He longed to clasp her in his arms, to hold her close, a mutinous, wild thing, but loving. He looked hastily away, ashamed of what seemed to him to be a kind of intrusion upon her innocence. Her clear, confiding gaze was still that of a child. Her feeling for him was evidently as unthinkingly fond and trusting as ever. It appealed to something higher than ordinary manhood in him. He must hide his rash desire from her. She would not understand it. It might easily offend her, and precipitate the estrangement between them he had begun to fear. Thank God, he was strong! He had long been accustomed to control himself. What he willed not to do. was seldom done. It seemed easy to deny himself for her sake. He had not reckoned, as yet, with the tyranny of the feeling which was but just stealing over him, that insidious force which confuses the clearest brain and mocks the most stubborn will. He would not have been so confident had he ever felt the full power of her sex.

Suddenly, Lydia gave a start, and exclaimed :

"Isn't that arbutus on the hillside yonder?"

They had entered a narrow, winding cove, with high, wooded banks on one side and open fields on the other.

"Yes," she added, as she looked again, "it is, really. I feared it would be out of bloom. How nice of it to wait for me! Run the boat in, Basil; I must pick some."

Basil obediently started to shift the sail, but before he could do so, she had changed her mind.

"No, it would detain us, and I can't lose a minute, now. To-morrow, the first thing after breakfast, we'll go to the Indian Spring; the arbutus is always so plentiful there."

A glimpse of the Manor house, straight ahead, increased her impatience, but they were still a mile or more away. The cove wound its tortuous course into the very heart of the plantation. The house lay on high ground about two

hundred yards from its banks, partly screened by evergreen hedges and trees.

Lydia guided the canoe skilfully through the sudden turns and past the sharp angles made by long points or tongues of land, and, finally, brought up at a wharf near the head of the cove. It was a rude structure of logs at the edge of a gravelled path that led up a steep hill to a grove of lofty oaks. Without pausing for Basil to make fast, she sprang out as the canoe glided alongside the wharf, and hastened up the path to the top of the bluff. The turf beneath the oaks was thickly studded with wild violets. A family tradition asserted that the parent plants had been brought from England by the immigrant Chestons, more than two hundred years before. The legend found some corroboration in the fact that they differed from their scentless cousins of the woods in having a fragrant odour. Lydia plucked a handful of the blossoms, and then, seating herself on the mossy roots of the largest oak, she inhaled their perfume in long, slow draughts. She was actually at home. The smell of violets made vivid this fact. She glanced about her with eager eyes, drinking in every detail of the scene.

This particular spot was especially dear to her. With it were associated some of her earliest impressions—impressions which had a delightful tinge of romance. As a child, she had been assured by her old negro nurse that the thickly-wooded ridge just across the cove was haunted. It was a weird place, with several gaunt trees, stripped of their bark by lightning, which stood out, white and naked, from the background of dark green cedars and pines. Many fallen giants lay rotting along the high, steep bank. Some of these were easily convertible by a child's imagination into ogres and monsters of terrifying shapes. There had been a time when Lydia believed it quite possible for them to rise in all their great bulk and height, and wade across the cove

to devour her. Even now, she felt a vague thrill at the remembrance of her childish terrors. How often she had sat under these old oaks and listened, shuddering yet fascinated, to negro folk-lore of witchcraft and ghosts, or amused and intensely sympathetic, to the tar-baby and rabbit stories which were common to the negroes of the Tidewater region and may have drifted gradually southward, to give, at last, a rich fund of material to Uncle Remus.

And there was another attraction in the spot. The bluff was a coign of vantage from which she could survey the greater part of the plantation. In whatever direction she looked, she had a glimpse of bits of landscape which revived, in turn, some strong impression. Over yonder, across a ravine, stretched a field in the middle of which stood a great oak, in whose top a family of fishing hawks had dwelt ever since she could remember. To the left, lay a dense thicket of laurel bushes, which, in a few weeks, would be a mass of pink and crimson blossoms. A little farther on, a tiny stream trickled through a coppice of willows, magnolias and wild rose bushes, to the cove. This was a favourite haunt of birds. Here she had often sat, quite still, listening to the carolling of various warblers and watching a scarlet tanager as it darted from bough to bough, a flash of flame. Each spot had its special individuality for her. There were certain trees and even stones which she regarded as her particular friends. The dearest of them all was the splendid old oak against whose trunk she was leaning. It was so strong, so rugged, so unchanging. With a sudden impulse, she turned and furtively pressed her lips to its bark.

A footstep caused her to look round guiltily, but it was only Basil. *He* would understand.

She sprang to her feet, and together, they started towards the house. Rover followed close behind them, having been admonished by his mistress to remain "at heel." She wished

to take the household by surprise, and, if anyone saw Rover scampering ahead, her secret would be out.

Their path led them, first, through an old apple orchard which lay at the rear of the negro "Quarter" and the stables. Beyond these, ran a broad, grassy lane separating them from the grounds about the "big house." The apple trees were in bloom. From a low hanging bough, Lydia plucked a spray of pink and white buds and fastened it at her throat. It seemed to Basil appropriate to her. Its delicate tints were not purer than those that blended in her cheeks. She, too, was a blossom still in the bud—a human blossom, the very incarnation of the springtime which was burgeoning all about them.

"We must avoid the Quarter," she whispered, laughing. "Someone might see us, and run ahead to the house and tell."

They stole noiselessly past the gable-end next the path, screened from observation by a hedge of cedar. The Quarter was a long, low building of brick, shaded by mulberries and locusts. In front of it, a group of negro children were playing in the road. They did not look up as Lydia and Basil slipped by and then descended hastily into a little valley where they were hidden from view. This valley rose gradually to high ground again, at a point where an arched gateway opened in a brick wall which formed the lower boundary of the rear lawn and the flower garden. The wall was thickly clothed with ivy which hung in clusters above the gate.

Basil opened the gate and Lydia passed in. She paused a moment to glance about her. The dear old garden—how trim and smart it looked! Uncle Cæsar had evidently just completed his spring work. The tall hedges of cedar and holly had been freshly clipped and the single evergreens reshaped into pyramids and cones. The turf had been shorn

and rolled so that it seemed to fit like a carpet of green velvet about the roots of the trees and along the narrow "borders" filled with old-fashioned flowers.

The garden was a spot of sweet and hallowed associations for the imaginative girl. Not only had it been her playground, the scene of delightful romps and frolics where she had often hidden, thrilling with mischievous enjoyment, in the fragrant depths of the huge box trees, but it was also identified with many a romantic story of the Manor. Here, generation after generation of her family had laughed and loved and dreamed. She could easily believe the tales of the negroes of ghostly visitations of dead-and-gone Chestons to its leafy alleys. Doubtless they loved it as she loved it. Why shouldn't they be drawn back to the spot? It was pleasant, though eerie, for her to feel that, perhaps, when she wandered here, she was surrounded by their sympathetic shades.

But she was too impatient, now, to linger long, and turning into a gravelled path between rows of tall pines alternating with bushy holly trees, she hastened towards the house. At a break in the shrubbery, she came upon a clear view of the building.

"Just a moment, Basil!" she exclaimed, and halting, she stood gazing with moistened eyes at the gaunt, weather-beaten pile.

The Manor house was very old, as age is measured in this still youthful land of ours. It was a rambling structure of mottled brick, reddish brown and gray, arranged in checkerboard fashion, with large verandahs, their roofs supported by stout Doric pillars, at front and rear. The gable-ends were covered with ivy, which also enveloped the chimneys in a mantle of lustrous green. Climbing roses and Virginia creeper wandered over the walls. Great lindens and elms swayed their branches above the roof, and weeping willows,

Lombardy poplars, hickories and oaks, all of them of large size, were scattered about the grounds which, with the front lane, must have covered a space of fifty acres or more. An avenue of spreading elms extended from the front verandah, shading the drive, to the gate which opened upon the public road, a distance of nearly half a mile. Their branches, interlacing, formed an almost perfect arch the whole way. From the rear verandah, the lawn, lined on each side by Lombardy poplars planted at regular distances like sentinels, descended in a succession of terraces to the garden wall. Flanking it, were the flower-gardens, divided into plots by hedges or by low borders of box, with gravelled paths shaded by a variety of shrubbery and trees.

About the whole place, there was an atmosphere of settled tranquillity and repose. There were many such places in Tidewater Maryland—a fact, in itself, indicative of a firmly rooted order of society which had long since passed through the process of evolution and had come to a standstill, well satisfied to rest.

It was hard for Lydia to refrain from rushing across the lawn by the nearest cut, but mastering the impulse, she turned away and proceeded up the avenue of pines. A few paces farther on, the sound of voices in conversation again arrested her steps.

"I hear Papa!" she cried, and leaving the path, she started impetuously across a flower-bed, trampling a fine plot of hyacinths as she ran. Breaking through a hedge of lilac bushes, she came upon the open lawn. Here, beneath a spreading horse chestnut, sat two gentlemen in rustic armchairs, smoking. One of them was her father; the other, her uncle, Mr. Josias Plunkett. The pair were oddly contrasted. The Colonel was a large, robust man, with the glow of vigorous health in his ruddy cheeks, and the light of a wholesome, genial temper in his kindly brown eyes.

Mr. Plunkett was a consequential little person, with self-importance written plainly on his pink-and-white face, clean-shaven, smug, supercilious.

Lydia stole upon them unobserved, and flung her arms about her father's neck.

"Bless my soul!" cried the Colonel, startled, and struggling to his feet. "You little scamp;" he added, delightedly, "you gave me a fright. What are you doing here?"

Lydia raised herself on tiptoe to kiss him. Her father seized her by the shoulders and holding her off at arm's length, gazed down at her in tender admiration. She was lovelier than ever.

"I ran away, Papa," she answered at last, with a mock air of penitence.

"Ran away!" he exclaimed. "It's what I feared, you rogue! I told the girls they wouldn't be able to keep you."

The Colonel still called his sisters "the girls," though they were verging upon fifty.

"They did their best, Papa," said Lydia, gaily, "but I was really incorrigible. They'll give me up, now, as a hopeless case—that's one comfort. I shall be permitted to stay here without any further petitions from them. No doubt they'll think I'm ungrateful, but I'm not. I was nearly wild—that's the truth. If I'd stayed another day, I might have done something dreadful and been packed off in disgrace. It was very discreet in me to run away."

"Very, indeed!" laughed her father. He felt he ought to scold her just a little, but how could he, with that flower-like face looking mischievously, and yet, appealingly, up at him?

"Have you missed me very much?" demanded Lydia, with a quizzical gleam in her eyes. As if there could be any doubt of that!

"Well—a little," said the Colonel, teasingly; "the house has been rather dull—eh, Josias?"

Mr. Plunkett nodded shortly, and stepping up to his niece, greeted her with a dry formality in which there was little trace of affection. Yes, the house had been dull, but he liked that sort of dullness. The liveliness caused by Lydia's presence was irritating to him. There was an old feud between them. A precise, order-loving old bachelor, he found only causes of disturbance and offence in Lydia's impetuosity of spirit. Ever since she had been able to crawl, she had kept him in a state of constant unrest and anxiety. He loved ease and quiet and a regular life. Nothing vexed him more than to have his pet habits interfered with. He considered himself a privileged member of the household because he was, in a certain sense, a guest—a guest of some twenty-five years' standing; that is to say, from the date of his sister's marriage to the Colonel. He had his particular armchair, his negro "boy," whom he had picked out from among the Colonel's slaves, his horse, his special dishes at table. His fishing tackle, his canes, his gun, all chosen from the Colonel's stock, were his exclusive property, which nobody else must touch. Lydia laid impious hands upon all. It was she who upset his tobacco box, broke his pipes, sent his "boy" on errands to unaccountable places, appropriated his armchair for a family of kittens, and so on, through a long catalogue of constantly recurring grievances. She had absolutely no sense of order. He declared once, with an oath, that she was a human mosquito, continually buzzing about—now here, now there, but nipping, at every chance, at him whose dearest wish it was to be let alone. The "dullness" which had reigned in the house during her absence had been bliss for him. He had hoped it would continue for nearly two months longer, and now, suddenly, here was Chaos come again! Good-bye, at once, to his delicious

afternoon naps, his unmolested enjoyment of his pipe, his quiet games of chess in the evening with the Colonel or Miss Twiggs, Lydia's former governess.

"What about your education?" he demanded sourly. "You don't mean to cut school altogether and grow up an ignoramus?"

Mr. Plunkett had a fondness for putting things bluntly. He was one of that class of men who find a relish in telling unpleasant truths. Besides, he was nettled at his niece. He wanted to "get even" with her for bursting upon him in this way, without the least notice.

"Thank you, Uncle Josias!" said Lydia, sweeping him a curtsy. She liked the sulky old curmudgeon and enjoyed his thrusts; they served to accentuate the affection that surrounded her at the Manor.

The Colonel exchanged laughing glances with her. "Uncle Josias" was a standing source of amusement for them. His strictures were never to be taken to heart. They were a kind of condiment that gave a keener flavour to life.

"We'll have to reconcile ourselves to her deficiencies, Josias," said the Colonel, with a jocose pretence of accepting the inevitable; "she has come to stay."

Mr. Plunkett turned short on his heel and left them. What was the use of arguing? His brother-in-law was simply daft about the girl. She could twist him round her little finger. In Mr. Plunkett's opinion, she was utterly spoiled. Well, he had spoken out, and now, he would wash his hands of her. Nobody could accuse him of not having said what he thought. It wouldn't be his fault if she turned out badly.

"Poor Uncle Josias!" exclaimed Lydia, "you've given him a blow, Papa! But it makes me so glad to know you won't send me away again. Isn't it better, after all, to be

a happy ignoramus here, than something—I don't know what—away from everything and everybody I love? And I wasn't learning much, either. You are in earnest? I may really stay?"

"As long as ever you like, my pet," replied the Colonel. "And now, run away to your mother. She has been pining for you lately, and counting the days for your return."

Lydia gave him another vigorous hug, and then sped lightly away to the house.

CHAPTER VI

Basil joined the Colonel shortly after Lydia had left him. He had waited purposely, not wishing to intrude upon the first moments of their meeting. He was greeted with a kindly, familiar nod. Basil was practically a member of the family and a day scarcely ever passed without a visit from him at the Manor.

"Lydia's home again," said the Colonel, brightly, sure that Basil, also, would be pleased. "But perhaps you've seen her?"

"Yes, sir; I brought her from the wharf in my canoe."

"Lucky you were there to meet her; she might have had some trouble finding a conveyance."

"You forget Cæsar and his ox-cart," suggested Basil, smiling. "She was about to start with him."

"Well, you saved him a disagreeable job," said the Colonel, with a hearty laugh; "'twould have been devilish hard on him to have had to bring her home in an ox-cart. The old fellow is getting more and more airy every day; he'll be teaching me manners after awhile. I wish I knew some way of taking him down a peg, but he enjoys his consequence so much I haven't the heart."

Basil thought to himself there were a good many things the Colonel hadn't the heart to do. A kinder soul never lived, notwithstanding his prejudices were strong and his temper choleric. It was hard for him to say "no." He liked to be on pleasant terms with everybody, down to the humblest of his slaves. But for the authority he derived from his position as "Marster" and the restraining influence of his mother, the discipline at the Manor would have

been but lax. His servants took advantage of him whenever they dared and obeyed him more from habit than for any other reason. All of them loved him more or less, but that did not prevent them from cheating him if they could. To Cæsar alone was his word the law, and it was so with him only because of the old servant's rigid notions of what was befitting. Basil often wondered at the Colonel's genial indifference, for he had been educated to habits of discipline at West Point and afterwards as an officer of dragoons in the regular army. Even now, as the commander of the county militia, he was strict at drill and often sharp and peremptory in manner. The truth was, probably, that his professional instinct reasserted itself when he donned his uniform, and that, at other times, he felt free to give his natural amiability full play.

"By the way, Basil," said the Colonel, "I want to consult you about my wheat. Smyrk (the overseer) thinks it has got the fly in it. If you don't mind, we'll look it over."

He often consulted Basil about farming matters, having great confidence in his judgment. Though a young man, Basil had already made a local reputation as a successful planter. At first, he had been sneered at as a "book farmer" and "visionary," but most of his experiments had succeeded and he had gone on raising larger crops and finer cattle every year. He had merely applied common sense and careful reading to his farming operations, but the results had astonished his neighbours, who persisted in doing things in a certain way because it had been sanctified by habit and tradition. His success was immensely gratifying to the Colonel who regarded him almost as a son and felt a kind of paternal pride in extolling him to his friends.

Basil's father had been the Colonel's favourite playmate in childhood and was still his dearest friend, and this fact gave a warmer tinge to his affection for the son. Since the death

of his wife many years before, Mr. Kent, who, until then, had been brought more or less into contact with his neighbours, had led a solitary life, shrinking more and more from society, and absorbed in philosophical studies. The Colonel was his only regular visitor. The dissimilarity of their temperaments and tastes was, strange to say, a strong factor in the intimacy of the two men. The one was essentially a man of action; the other, a thinker and a dreamer. The Colonel loved out-door life; Mr. Kent hated to stir beyond his study; to leave, for a moment, his beloved books. Each admired the other for the qualities that were lacking in himself. The Colonel was lost in naive wonder at the bookworm's learning, which seemed to him prodigious. Mr. Kent envied the Colonel his animal spirits, his vigorous health, his keen zest in life. At times, he almost wished the Colonel would carry him off with him and force him to share the enjoyments of fresh air and sunshine in which he seemed to delight. Without knowing it, the Colonel brought into his study, musty with the smell of books, a flavour of the woods and fields that tantalised and allured the toil-worn scholar. It was a breath of that pulsating outer life which he shrank from, yet secretly craved.

For his old friend's sake, the Colonel had taken Basil under his special charge from the first, supplying the deficiencies in his father which might have made his boyhood a lonely and cheerless one. It was the Colonel who saw to it that he had the usual associations and enjoyments of boys of his age and encouraged him to take an interest in the management of the estate. In course of time, he had grown very fond of Basil and had fallen into the habit of deferring to him because, as he said, he had an old head on young shoulders. Whenever he was in doubt or difficulty, he turned instinctively to him.

It would have been well for him had he confided in him

fully. His affairs were in serious disorder, though he did not know it, and Basil, who had real capacity as a manager, might have extricated him. But the Colonel fancied everything was going on swimmingly at the Manor. True, there were debts, but the Manor was a great estate and Reeve made borrowing so easy for him! He could not hide from himself the fact that the plantation was not nearly so productive as in his father's day, but he was always hoping for a favourable turn. He could not see why it was. He had spent large sums for "improvements" of various kinds, and was always ready to embark in some new enterprise, but to his surprise, very few of his investments yielded any return. Basil could have enlightened him. He saw clearly enough that most of his schemes were extravagant and strongly suspected that the overseer, Smyrk, was a rogue. But how could he tell the Colonel, even indirectly, that he was thriftless, speculative, credulous—an easy prey for every swindler who came along? Besides, Basil had no suspicion of the actual facts. He did not dream that the Colonel was in serious danger. He, also, thought the Manor too great an estate to become involved by mere negligence. The Colonel had always been easy-going and improvident, and no great harm had, apparently, resulted. Why should he meddle? He was diffident, too, of his own opinions. Because he had succeeded in his father's affairs, it did not follow that he could be useful in the Colonel's. Even when asked, he hesitated to give him advice.

His course would have been very different could he have known that the Colonel's resources were being deliberately sapped by the Colonel's trusted agent, Reeve, in collusion with the overseer. The cunning lawyer was an adept in absorbing large estates. For many years, he had made a business of lending money, with men of straw as the ostensible creditors. He chose his victims judiciously among the

incapable and prodigal, and little by little, got them into his power, finally plucking them as remorselessly as he dared. He did not hope to obtain possession of the Manor for himself. That would be a dangerous, though a tempting, feat. To be the acknowledged master where he was now a mere retainer, was an idea that appealed to him strongly, but he could not afford it. It would be ruinous, not only for him but for his son, to appear before the community as the destroyer of the family which, in popular estimation, had made him what he was. He would have to do that if he openly took the estate. No; he must content himself with getting the Colonel so deep in debt that he would practically own him. The Chestons fancied they had made him; there was keen relish for him in the thought that, some day, they might discover he could make or unmake them. And it was within the range of possibility that he might be able, ultimately, to seat his son in the Colonel's place without incurring the odium he feared.

The Colonel was mere clay in such hands. He had not been educated as a planter but as a soldier, and had spent his early manhood in the army. Called to the management of the estate unexpectedly upon the death of his father, to take the place of his elder brother, who had been disinherited, he had brought to his duties fixed ideas and habits. It was too late for him to change. He laboured conscientiously to adapt himself to the new conditions, and after awhile, deluded himself with the notion that he had succeeded. So far as mere externals went, he was a model country gentleman of the accepted type. He was a delightful host, a "social leader," an impressive figure on all public occasions. He could even talk quite fluently about farming, and imagined himself an authority on horses and cattle. But as to the real economics of agriculture, he learned little or nothing. Persuaded by Reeve that old Cæsar (who the lawyer soon

found was incorruptible) was too severe upon his fellow-slaves, he supplanted him with Smyrk, and committed all the details to him. He trusted both the lawyer and the overseer implicitly; it would never have occurred to him to suspect them of treachery. Both had been born on the estate. He looked upon them as his henchmen, and imagined they were devoted to his interests. It was necessary to snub Reeve at times, but he never dreamed that he would bear him any grudge for that. In his heart, of course, the fellow must know his place!

Under these conditions, it was easy to fleece him. The process had been going on for some twenty years. Reeve had heavy mortgages on the Manor. Smyrk was the owner of several farms in a distant part of the State. The Colonel was on the verge of bankruptcy. Neither he nor any of his friends had the faintest inkling of the fact. When he needed money, Reeve was at hand to supply it. The Colonel never hesitated to respond to an appeal for aid, and was always ready to "go security" for a friend. A thorough optimist, he was confident that everything would come right in the end, and went on carelessly enjoying himself, after the manner of his kind.

After a careful examination of the wheat, Basil expressed the opinion that the damage was not so serious as Smyrk had imagined. Reassured, the Colonel started to return to the house.

"Any news at the wharf?" he inquired. "I forgot to ask you. Lydia's sudden arrival drove everything else clean out of my head."

Basil told him of the riot in Baltimore on the previous day. The Colonel listened, deeply interested. This was stirring news, indeed!

"They drove the troops back?" he demanded eagerly. "They were only volunteers."

As a " regular army " man, he held the militia in scant esteem, though he owed his title partly to the fact that he held the command of the county battalion. However, he would have been dubbed " the Colonel " by his neighbours in any event, merely because he was the master of the Manor. The title, by common consent, went with the estate. For generations, the owner, in the absence of any other dignity, had been known as " the Colonel." Even his father, the Judge, had been " Colonel " up to the time of his elevation to the bench. It was a title which had lost its military significance, and had become a kind of hereditary badge of rank.

" No, they succeeded in getting through to Washington," said Basil.

" The devil they did ! We must stop that. It's nothing short of invasion, sir—invasion of a sovereign state."

The Colonel was greatly excited. He had always been an ardent " States' Rights " man and a " strict constructionist " of the Constitution. The South, for him, was sacred soil. Its institutions, ideas, habits were unimpeachable ; its social economy the best that could be devised, not only for his own class, but as he believed, for the community as a whole. He confused the interests of a small oligarchy with the general interests. To his mind, that oligarchy was the special depositary of intelligence, of culture, of order. Was it not best for the " poor whites " as well as for the negroes, that they should be guided and controlled by a disciplined force rather than by the caprices of their ignorance and folly ? It was no hardship, for them, any more than for so many children, to be denied a power they would infallibly, in his opinion, have abused.

He failed to see that repression, however benevolent, generates in all human society diseases which gradually sap the stateliest and stoutest fabric. All was fair, to his eye,

because the many submitted so amiably to the few. He was blind to the fact that the free states were rapidly outstripping the slave states in wealth, in enlightenment, in the general average of happiness precisely because they gave every individual an equal chance. He pitied what seemed to him their inevitable lack of social graces, their sordid materialism. How could there be any fixed standard of refinement, any real cultivation among people who had no recognised gentry, and rated men only according to their individual efficiency or their wealth, acquired, perhaps, in some low form of industry or trade ? What wonder that he was intolerant of conditions the opposite of those which made the atmosphere of his own home so genial, so pleasant ?

There were some persons in the North, however, to whom he conceded qualities corresponding to those which his caste monopolised in the South. They were members of "old families" with whom the Chestons had sustained relations of intimacy from colonial times. Every autumn, a party made up of Philadelphians and New Yorkers, with sometimes a Bostonian or two, came down to the Manor to hunt, accompanied by their wives and daughters. The Colonel returned their visits in winter, and met them every summer at Newport or Saratoga, or perhaps, at one of the Virginia Springs. No doubt, there linger in Northern households, even yet, many pleasant memories of the Colonel, of his quaint ingenuousness, his dignified suavity, his careful deference for women, his tenderness for children. He never aired his sectional arrogance there, but it was alive and active in him none the less, and now, it burst forth in a flame.

"I must order out the battalion at once," he exclaimed. "The whole military force of the State should take the field."

Basil glanced at him anxiously. He was fearful he might do something rash. The community was already in a ferment. A hasty word from a man of the Colonel's influence, and a conflagration would follow. It seemed to Basil to be a time, not for precipitate action, but for caution and restraint. The situation was deplorable enough as it was; it could only be aggravated by appeals to the passions of the hour.

"You will not act without orders, I presume?" he ventured doubtfully.

The Colonel was taken aback. The question was like a cold douche to him. Act without orders? How could he? Was he not an old army officer, a West Pointer, to whom obedience was the fundamental law of military conduct?

"Of course not," he answered mechanically. With a laugh, as he realised the folly of his proposed action, he added, "You've saved me from a bad blunder, my boy. What would people have said had I given the word without waiting to hear from the brigade commander? It would have been gross insubordination. It seems I need some one to keep me straight; I must make you my adjutant!"

CHAPTER VII

Lydia found her mother in bed. Mrs. Cheston was suffering from a nervous attack, of a kind to which she was often subject. Its most marked symptom was intense irritability. When Lydia entered the room, she was tossing impatiently about and scolding her attendant, a tall mulatto woman, for being unable to make her comfortable. "You are so clumsy, Phyllis!" she exclaimed, "will you never learn how to fix the pillows?" The woman said nothing, but glanced at her moodily, biting her lip, as she obediently smoothed a pillow. A look of suppressed vindictiveness flitted across her swarthy face, and a touch of crimson showed itself in her cheeks. She hated her mistress, not so much because she upbraided her so often without reason, though that was hard to bear, as because she knew the secret of her ailment, a secret which Mrs. Cheston guarded jealously from every human eye, especially her husband's. She, Phyllis, and she only, could tell what it was that had wrecked her mistress's health and left her a frail, nervous woman prematurely old and always dreading exposure. Mrs. Cheston had no suspicion of her knowledge. To her eyes, she was but an ordinary servant. How she would have shuddered could she have known that the silent, submissive creature whom she felt free to vent her ill-humour upon, had it in her power to betray her if she chose! But Phyllis was afraid to betray her; her unsupported word would probably carry but little weight and she might ruin herself instead of hurting her mistress. "Marster" would be sure to send her away; perhaps he would sell her. Her hatred was better served by silence; she could always be near her mistress to enjoy her misery.

It was luxury to the savage soul of the mulatto to watch her as she writhed in the agony of a sudden spasm. "Miss Flo'r's" inmost thoughts lay before her, she fancied, an open book. Vain remorse and longing, as well as terror of discovery, no doubt, gave poignancy to her fits of despair, for they were little else. Phyllis knew there had been a time when this woman had felt a consuming passion, but not for the man who had afterwards become her husband. It was the Colonel's brother, Edgar Cheston, who had won her heart, years ago. Phyllis, then a beautiful girl, had attracted the notice of "Young Marster," and worshipping him, had been compelled to see him turn from her to "Miss Flo'r." It was because of this she hated her, and there was more. For Edgar Cheston having jilted her, "Miss Flo'r" had consoled herself with his brother, and after their marriage, had bitterly avenged the wrong she had suffered by intriguing successfully to dispossess Edgar as the chosen heir to the estate. It was through her, and her alone, Phyllis often told herself, that "Marse Edgar" had been disinherited and driven from home. Long years ago, he had disappeared in the far West, and nothing had since been heard from him. It was all her mistress's fault. But for her, he might now be living in ease at the Manor, and she, Phyllis, might be at the side of the man whom she had never ceased to adore with the humble but none the less passionate devotion of a slave.

At times, she felt a fierce contempt when she saw the Colonel with his wife and watched the latter's demonstrations of affection. Mrs. Cheston had learned to love the man whom she had married from pique and ambition, but Phyllis did not believe this. It was, to her eyes, all a sham. Fear of his anger alone, she was confident, prompted her mistress to coddle him, to puff him up with the idea that he was everything to her, so that if he did hear anything, he

would be slow to believe it. But it was precisely because she loved him, that Mrs. Cheston's dread of detection was so acute. The Colonel had no suspicion of her youthful passion for his brother, though he knew that they had had some sort of "affair," or of the part she had played in making him, her husband, the master of the Manor. He was convinced his father had substituted him in his will solely because he had discovered that Edgar was a spendthrift. That his wife could have had any share in this revelation would have seemed to him the figment of a disordered brain, and Mrs. Cheston felt that if he ever learned the truth, he would despise her. She clung to his unquestioning trust and affection with all the greater tenacity, because of her sense of guilt towards him. Phyllis would have rejoiced could she have satisfied herself that Mrs. Cheston cared for her husband, and in caring, suffered the more, but she believed her pride alone was involved. She was sure the flame of passion still burned in her mistress, as it burned in her, though now, it had evidently taken the form of a hopeless disappointment, a canker of regret, which the broken wife and mother must always hide.

If Edgar Cheston should reappear some day! That were an event that might unseal her (Phyllis's) lips. She could give free rein to her malice, then. His presence would protect her; he would be sure to encourage her, to egg her on; he was doubtless even more venomous than she. From his point of view, he had suffered a monstrous wrong, and he was not the kind of man to forgive. He had always been vindictive in punishing even slight injuries; there would be no pity in him now. Revenge, such as he would take, would be well worth waiting for. But his return were too much to hope for. In common with all the members of the family, so she imagined, Phyllis thought it likely, from his long silence, that he was dead. There was

one secret her mistress had really hid from her. Mrs. Chesston had heard from Edgar on two occasions, and she strongly suspected he was still alive. For twenty years or more, she had lived, from day to day, in dread of his return. It was the uncertainty that gave vitality to her fears. But for this, she might, at last, have found the solace of security and peace. As it was, her life was a daily ordeal of craving for unalloyed enjoyment of the affection that surrounded her with tender care and of shuddering suspense under which, at times, her strength gave way and she was seized with fits of nervous fright. No wonder her disorder puzzled her physician; its cause lay far beyond the reach of his drugs.

Lydia drew near the bed softly, but her mother, sensitive to the slightest sound, turned hastily, and recognising her, though the room was dark, gave a cry of delight.

"Ah, my darling!" she exclaimed in a thin, worn voice, as she clasped her to her breast, "I wanted you so much! I have been almost beside myself to-day. No one could soothe me. I was thinking of you, and wishing, with all my heart, you were here. There, put your hand on my forehead —so. Isn't it hot? And your hand is so soft, so cool. We won't talk, dear. I need sleep, above everything, and I *can* sleep if you'll sit beside me, and hold your hand just there."

She sank back on the pillow as she spoke and closed her eyes. Lydia stroked her brow lightly, smoothing back the disordered tresses of raven hair streaked with grey. Her touch seemed magnetic. In a few moments, the querulous look left her mother's face, and presently, she was sleeping as tranquilly as a child. The tinkle of the dinner-bell did not disturb her. Lydia knew she might leave without risk of waking her. Stealing noiselessly out of the room, she descended to the dining-room, where she had a

hearty greeting from her grandmother, her brother, and Miss Twiggs, her former governess. Ah, it was good to see them all once more! And the dinner—how delicious it was! The food here had a different taste, a finer flavour than at her Aunts', though the latter, like all Tidewater women, were dainty epicures and prided themselves on their cooking.

Lydia ate but little of the tempting profusion before her, though her appetite had been sharpened by the air of the Bay. She was too busy talking. She had questions to ask of everyone as to what had happened in her absence. No detail was too trivial for her. Now and then, she paused to glance about her with eager interest. The homely atmosphere of the dining-room was sweet to her. Its furniture and appointments, like everything else at the Manor, were old and worn, but their very shabbiness endeared them to her. The faded, almost threadbare, carpet; the tarnished gilt mirror behind her father's chair reflecting the lawn and front lane, with its avenue of elms; the horsehair sofa against the wall; the huge armchair, with a striped linen cover, in one corner; the great mahogany side-board, with its carved urn at each end and its imposing array of silver; the colored prints of prize cattle and engravings of "Shakespeare and His Friends," and of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," which still hung in the same places on the walls—each and every object was idealized for her by childish memories. The slightest change would have robbed the room of something of its charm.

Immediately after dinner, she returned to her mother and found her still asleep.

"Call me if she wakens, Phyllis," she whispered to the mulatto, who stood like a sentinel near the head of the bed, "I am going to look about me, but shan't be far away."

She was eager to make a tour of the house and grounds. Basil, no doubt, would like to accompany her. She went to

look for him in the library, for after dinner, her father always took his guests there to smoke. She had no scruples about disturbing them. Uncle Josias didn't matter—he was sure to resent her intrusion anywhere; the others always welcomed her.

The library was a hexagon-shaped wing which projected from the western gable of the main building. It looked out, on one side, upon the rear lawn and garden, and on another, upon the family graveyard which lay at the head of the avenue of pines, but a few feet from the corner of the house. The graveyard, enclosed by a mossy brick wall, contained many graves covered with periwinkle which was now in bloom. Most of the graves were marked by shafts of granite or sandstone or by marble tombs engraved with lengthy epitaphs beneath coats of arms. The family burial places at nearly all the old plantations of Tidewater Maryland are to be found thus, close to the house. Is there not something touching in the fact? Does it not speak eloquently of affection, surviving death, which prompts the living to treat the departed ones as still having part and parcel in the home they loved? The plantation families kept their dead near them, with no feeling of fear or repugnance, that they might watch over them—sure that they, in their turn, would thus be tenderly cared for and cherished long after their dust had mingled with the beloved soil.

The tall oaken shelves of the library were tightly packed with old books. Many of them had been printed in London early in the seventeenth century. On the fly leaves of some of these were written the names of half a dozen successive owners, with occasionally, quaint comments and reflections of some reader of scribbling propensity. In one corner stood a sword and a couple of lances, memorials of the Colonel's army career. On the wall above the open fireplace, hung prints of famous race-horses. Upon the yellow

muslin blinds of the windows, were crude bits of landscape, supposed to depict certain scenes at the Manor, which some visitor, who fancied himself an artist, had painted years before with rough strokes of green.

When Lydia appeared in the doorway, the smokers, tilted back comfortably in large, rush-bottomed chairs, were well advanced in enjoyment of the weed. Each had a clay pipe with a long reed stem, and the atmosphere was thick with smoke from fragrant tobacco grown on the estate. Lydia waited, mischievously, for the anathema Uncle Josias would be swift to pronounce, but the old fellow merely grunted and gave a longer pull at his pipe.

"Come, Basil," she said, with a confident air of proprietorship, "I'm going to see how you kept your promise to look after things for me."

Basil rose promptly and emptied his pipe. The Colonel laughingly protested.

"You might have let him finish his smoke," he said, "it is cruel to cut a fellow off in that way."

Uncle Josias looked up at the ceiling with a sarcastic air. What did she care? It was just as he expected—breaking in upon them at every whip-stitch.

"Fill up your pipe again, Basil," said Lydia compassionately, "I'll wait."

"Nonsense!" said Basil, smiling, "I know you're eager to be off."

Lydia thanked him with a nod, rather carelessly. She couldn't remember a time when he hadn't been ready to drop anything for her. She took it quite as a matter of course.

As the door closed behind them, Uncle Josias turned to the Colonel with a knowing air, which was also inquisitorial.

"They're as fond of each other as ever," he said, "Lydia's almost a woman: I presume you see how the thing will end?"

"I *hope* I do," replied the Colonel smiling. "There are not many young fellows like Basil."

It was on the tip of Mr. Plunkett's tongue to say, "No, thank Heaven, there are not!" but he refrained. His easy-going brother-in-law usually suffered him to say what he pleased, but he was infatuated with that solemn owl. It might be unsafe to criticise him. Mr. Plunkett did not like Basil. There was nothing in common between them. The meddlesome old bachelor was sociable, chatty, inquisitive, with a keen love of scandal and a biting tongue. The indifference to the petty affairs of his neighbours which Basil always exhibited was annoying to him. He had been baffled more than once by his reserve.

But after all, what did it matter? If his brother-in-law wished to give his daughter to a dull, sulky fellow, why should he object? The sooner Lydia was married and out of the house, the sooner peace and quiet would come again. He would always think her choice a poor one, but if she really cared for Basil, *he* needn't worry.

"Damme!" he said suddenly to himself, "I'll help on the match!" He must have a finger in the pie, somehow; he fancied nothing could go on at the Manor smoothly without his help.

CHAPTER VIII

"We must first pay Aunt Barbara a visit," said Lydia, as they started down the hall.

"Aunt Barbara" was Mrs. Gleaves, the housekeeper. She had been a notable figure in the family for half a century or more, and was next in authority to the domestic autocrat—Ole Miss. Mrs. Gleaves was the widow of a Manor tenant whose family, as well as her own, had been retainers of the Chestons since the first occupation of the land. "Aunt Barbara's" interests were wholly identified with those of the Manor household. She had no ambitions and scarcely any ideas which were not bounded by the Manor horizon. Her devotion, silent, unobtrusive, yet always alert and active, was rewarded with a consideration which raised her above the level of a servant and almost to the dignity of a friend. In her heart, she was very proud of this distinction, and occasionally showed a sense of her importance in her manner towards the negroes and even towards white people whom she considered inferior. She knew the family history by heart and was a bubbling spring of anecdotes, ghost stories, traditions of former occupants of the Manor. Lydia had always been her most eager listener, and the old woman had grown to love her more than even her own flesh and blood, for, blended with her affection, was a feeling of fond admiration for the lovely, impetuous child, who seemed, to her untutored but keen intelligence, the embodiment of those influences which had given the family its special stamp.

The housekeeper's room was a spacious apartment next to the kitchen, with a brick floor and a large open fireplace. Half-way up the walls extended oak cupboards with shelves

for china and glass. In one corner was the pantry, with treasures of groceries, pickles and preserves over which the old woman kept vigilant guard. A door in another corner opened upon the stairs descending to the cellars containing wines and liquors and a varied assortment of household supplies, of which she was also the custodian. No slave was expert enough in "takin' things ter eat"—they did not consider this stealing—to baffle her, unless, as sometimes happened, her attention was diverted. It was a clever bit of work, even then, if one of them succeeded in making an extra dip into the flour barrel or the tea canister under her nose.

When Lydia and Basil entered, they found Mrs. Gleaves seated at a table near the open window, through which came puffs of warm fragrant air from the front lawn. Her face, round and rosy as an apple, was framed in bunches of tiny curls of snow-white hair at each temple. A huge check apron, with pleated bib, hid most of her gown of brown bombazine. From a belt about her waist, hung a large bunch of keys, which jingled whenever she moved. A pile of coarse towels lay on the table beside her, and crouched on wooden stools or crickets at her feet, sat a brace of negro girls who were taking their first lesson in sewing. They were awkward young hoydens who had run wild at the Quarter until now, and their souls were in fierce revolt at being subjected to the discipline which Mrs. Gleaves had already begun to enforce with a sharp rap of her scissors, now and then, on their knuckles. Their heads were bent low over their work, and Mrs. Gleaves was gazing down at the woolly topknots with stern disfavour and meditating an early change in their style of hair-dressing, as a prerequisite to converting them into tidy house-servants. It was a style, she considered, which was befitting only to savages, an irritating survival of barbarism. The head was laid off into small squares by

dint of persistent combing, and in these plots, the coarse black hair was gathered up into wisps and twisted into horns, tied about with strings, which stood out comically here and there from the skull. The creatures needed but rings in their noses, "Aunt Barbara" thought, to convince one they had just come from Africa. In front of the fireplace, in which some charred logs were smouldering, knelt a negro urchin, with a board before him propped on one knee, on which he was polishing knives with the aid of brick-dust. As he rubbed, he nodded, and occasionally ducking forward, seemed about to tumble into the fire. Mrs. Gleaves kept a watchful eye on him, however, and a warning "Take keer, Hezekiah!" would cause him to straighten up with a start, just in time.

At sight of Lydia in the doorway, Mrs. Gleaves rose nimbly, with an exclamation of delight.

"You haven't forgotten the old woman, after all," she said, seizing both her hands. "You were so long coming, I almost give you up."

"I was with Mamma," explained Lydia, kissing her. "I have come to you first, after her. I'm so glad to see you, dear Aunt Barbara!"

The negro damsels exchanged sly glances and thrust out their tongues. "Dat 'ooman," as they contemptuously designated her to each other, a "dear"! To them, their knuckles still smarting from her taps, she seemed a kind of ogress.

After chatting for awhile with Mrs. Gleaves, Lydia passed into the kitchen and was greeted with noisy demonstrations by its mistress, Aunt Dinah, an enormously stout old woman with a jovial countenance, black and shining, and little twinkling eyes embedded in fat.

"Laws, honey," said Dinah heartily, "I'se glad ter see ye lookin' so peart. I wuz feared dey'd starve you off dah.

Dey tells me dey only gives you enuff ter peck at in de city. I boun' ye missed my wittels—didn't ye now?"

"I did indeed, Aunt Dinah!" said Lydia laughing. "There's no cooking like yours."

Aunt Dinah gave a self-satisfied wave of the hand as if inviting Young Miss to look about her. She had heard of her arrival promptly, and had at once set her corps of satellites to work to "fix up" for the visit she would be sure to pay her. The shelves and tables glittered with an array of highly-polished tin and brass utensils, and the brick floor had been freshly swept. Aunt Dinah wore her best linsey-woolsey gown and her gayest turban. On the hearth before a cavernous fireplace, with the usual equipment of crane, spits, pot-hooks and hangers, his nose thrust under a huge Dutch oven, lay Rover, dozing after a bountiful repast. Lydia glanced at him and smiled. Dogs were usually excluded rigorously from Aunt Dinah's domain. The indulgence accorded to Rover was meant, Lydia knew, as a special compliment to her.

From the kitchen, Lydia and Basil proceeded through a yard, roughly paved with stones and shaded by lindens, past the dairy to the stables. The latter, a group of low wooden buildings, stood near the edge of the bank descending to the cove. Lydia waited in the lane while Basil went in search of her riding horse, Knight, whom she had left in his care.

Basil led him forth with some pride in the fact that he was in fine condition. Every day during Lydia's absence, Basil had seen that he was properly groomed and exercised. His sleek brown coat shone like satin. He reared his delicate head quickly and gave a joyous neigh on seeing his mistress.

"Thank you so much, Basil!" said Lydia, as she stroked the horse's glossy mane, and fed him with lumps of sugar. "We shall have a fine gallop to-morrow, old fellow!" she added, looking into Knight's bright, eager eyes.

A short distance from the stable, in a corner of the old apple orchard, stood a little building of logs with pointed roof of cedar branches. This was Lydia's bird-house, in which were collected specimens of all the birds to be found at the Manor. This, too, had been placed under Basil's charge.

As Lydia entered, there was a great fluttering of wings and shrill chirps which she interpreted as notes of welcome.

"They know me, too!" she cried, delightedly, passing hurriedly from cage to cage and greeting each occupant with mock formality. All at once, she stopped short, and after a moment's indecision, began to throw open the doors of the cages. "I'm going to let them out," she said, impulsively, "I've learned what captivity means. They, also, shall have their freedom."

Most of the birds flew off at once and were lost in the leafage of the orchard. Others fluttered uncertainly about her head, as though loth to leave her. One plump, consequential little sparrow perched himself upon her shoulder and looked inquiringly up into her face as though to ask if she knew what she was doing. A moment later, he flew back to his cage and began contentedly to preen his feathers. Lydia glanced at him with a comical air of disgust. Evidently, there were birds as well as people who had no spirit, who were perfectly satisfied to stay in cages.

At the Quarter, Lydia was received in state by old "Aunt Sukey," a withered crone of eighty, who ruled its occupants —men, women and children—with a heavy hand. Sukey had been Lydia's nurse and professed the most ardent devotion for her. But she was a diplomatic old creature, and her profuse demonstrations of affection may have been prompted in part, by the fact that Young Miss was a power at "de big house," and a useful intermediary in procuring indulgences and favours.

Sukey sat enthroned in a large armchair in front of the Quarter door. Grouped about her were a number of women and girls delighted at the chance of lounging away an hour or two while awaiting Young Miss's expected visit. A long-eared hound lay stretched at her feet and a score or more of pickaninnies were playing in the lane. The men and larger boys were at work in the fields.

"Chillern!" cried Sukey, as she saw Lydia and Basil approaching, "whar's de manners I taught ye?"

The little negroes, instantly leaving off play, ranged themselves in a compact mass and began to duck their heads and scrape their feet backwards, crying shrilly, with one voice,

"Sobbun, Miss Lydyer! Sobbun, Marse Basil!"

Lydia called out gaily, "Well, children!" and paused to exchange greetings with Aunt Sukey. Sukey was voluble in her expressions of delight. "Hit do de old nigger's eyes good ter see you onc't mo'," she declared. But her trouble was wasted. She had confidently expected a gratuity—a silver half dollar or quarter—but Lydia passed on, without bestowing the coveted coin. "All dat waste o' breff fur nuthin!" muttered Sukey, sourly. "Ne' mind, do'; I'll have it frum her fo' de week's out!"

About a hundred yards beyond the Quarter, at the edge of a ravine, stood the overseer's house, a wooden building, painted yellow, with bushes of honeysuckle at each side of the door. Here, Lydia paused for a word with Mrs. Smyrk, the overseer's wife. Mrs. Smyrk had always been an object of solicitude to her, because of her stubborn melancholy. She was a gaunt, sad-eyed woman, who seemed to extract a gloomy pleasure from looking on the dark side of things. Lydia had often laboured zealously to enliven her, with but indifferent results. It was one of her fondest ambitions to bring even a fleeting smile to that woebegone visage. Mrs. Smyrk, to use her own expression, was "allers down-

hearted." She never admitted that she was in a more hopeful condition than "middlin' mizzerble." She thanked the "good Lawd" fervently if she was no worse than "ruther po'ly." She belonged, in short, to the apathetic type of "poor whites"—the most forlornly shiftless of human beings.

Mrs. Smyrk happened to be in the front yard. She greeted her visitors mournfully and asked them, as if in duty bound and not at all as if she wished it, to "step in en' tek a cheer." Lydia declined her grudging hospitality, saying she preferred to sit down on a bench beneath a large cherry tree white with blossoms that formed a snowy dome about which bees were humming.

"How are the children?" asked Lydia, brightly.

Mrs. Smyrk shook her head.

"Fever'n ager," she replied lugubriously. "Seems like they kain't git shet o' chills. Smyrk'll have a big doctor's bill ter pay."

She made this announcement with, apparently, a certain relish.

"Nonsense!" said Lydia, "you know that'll be Papa's affair."

"Hit don't 'pear ter me ter be right——" began Mrs. Smyrk, following an accustomed form of protest, which was always overcome, but Lydia rising, cut short her demurrer.

"Well, I hope they'll soon be running about."

She had a suspicion that they were even now off in the woods or the fields, for the house was strangely quiet, and they were a turbulent, noisy pack. But she had never known them to be without some distressing ailment; their mother's imagination was tireless in ascribing to them all sorts of ills.

Lydia turned away with a blithe leave-taking which only deepened the gloom on Mrs. Smyrk's face, and hastened on towards the barn, which stood on an elevation about a fur-

long away on the other side of the ravine. "The barn" was a group of buildings, including a large brick granary, corn-cribs, and sheds of logs thatched with straw for sheltering cattle. The enclosure was divided into pounds for the live stock, and beyond the granary lay a large threshing-yard which contained great ricks and stacks of straw and hay. The threshing-yard had been a favourite playground for Lydia as a child. There was no amusement more exciting for her than to climb to the top of one of the tall stacks and then slide swiftly down the steep incline to be buried in the fragrant depths of straw at the bottom. She wasn't sure she wouldn't find it delightful, even now.

When Lydia and Basil reached the spot, they found the cows collected in one of the pounds for milking. Lydia wandered fearlessly among them, in spite of a warning from Cynthy, the dairy-woman, a wiry little negress, that some of them were "wicious," and paused, now and then, to stroke an old favourite. Cynthy, fearing the results of Young Miss's rashness, beckoned to a negro urchin squatting on the fence and bade him "keep nigh" her. Marse Basil might suffice to protect her, but Cynthy felt that, with Friz to watch over her, she was safe from any possible harm. Friz was an expert in managing cattle. Armed with a long leather whip, which he "cracked" with a noise like the report of a pistol, he flitted about among the formidable beasts—elusive, untiring, bold to the verge of audacity, pausing only to inflict a sting, a human hornet that the wildest of them feared. Even the surly old bull struck his colours to Friz and grew meekly docile when the tiny despot approached him, flourishing his whip. Friz followed Young Miss about with a pompous air of protection. His services, however, were not needed. The cows, without exception, behaved most amiably. Perhaps they divined that Lydia was their friend.

The sun had sunk to the surface of the river, which

gleamed, a ribbon of silver, in the distance. The scene was full of that peace and serenity which invest even the dullest landscape with a certain charm at the close of the day. Everything seemed to feel the soothing influence of the coming night. The very attitudes of the cattle suggested quiet and repose. In the sunset glow, the reddish walls of the granary contrasted strongly with the pale gold of the straw stacks and the grayish tones of the sheds.

Lydia's tour of inspection ended here. Her curiosity was slaked for to-day. To-morrow, she would go farther afield, to the tenant houses, the negro cabins scattered over the estate, and so on, day by day, until she had re-explored the whole domain. Ah, how delightful to feel that there was to be no limit to her wanderings—that she was here for good! Thus far, it was all the same. No changes of moment had occurred during her absence. Nor was there any difference in her impressions. It was this she had feared most of all. There was little likelihood of any serious changes in the Manor itself—certainly none that were rash or arbitrary. It was a finished place, and the family were so proud of it that any radical alteration would have been regarded as irreverent. Even her brother, Turlo, impetuous and headstrong as he was, would probably hesitate a long time, when he came to be master, to fell an old tree or even to change the course of a fence. But Lydia had been haunted by anxiety as to how it would look to her when she returned. It might be that the house, which she remembered as so big and imposing, would seem but an ordinary, commonplace building. The favourite nooks in the garden and along the cove which had so many tender associations for her might have lost their charm. Even the negroes might lack the characteristics with which her memory had endowed them. Her aunts, anxious to reconcile her to their ways, had sought to temper her recollections, predicting confidently that she

would be more or less disappointed upon her return. She had resisted passionately the idea of such a change, but nevertheless, had secretly feared it. What a relief to find that her apprehension was unfounded ! Her old impressions had been renewed ; if anything, they were stronger, more vivid.

Returning to the house by way of the garden, Lydia and Basil reached the front lawn just as the sun was shedding its last crimson rays. The long avenue of elms was bathed in reddish mist which gave a purple tinge to their huge gray boles and caused the boldly arching branches to fade away in the distance like the rafters of some vast cathedral shrouded in a cloud of incense. The noble nave of Nature's architecture was, in truth, at this moment, a sylvan temple radiant in the setting sun. Near a clump of pines at the western boundary of the lawn, some Southdown sheep were grazing under the care of a gray-coated old negro who was leaning lazily against a corner of the graveyard wall. Through the slender, swaying pines, the narrowed reaches of the river flashed in bright glimpses here and there. The moon, now full, had risen, and hung, a globe of luminous pink, in the deep blue of the eastern sky. Lydia drew a long breath. She felt the spot had never before possessed so great a charm. It was touched by a fleeting beauty that might never again present itself to her.

" Ah, Basil ! " she sighed, " I wonder if you realise how happy I am ! "

He smiled, not thinking it necessary to answer her. If he did not realise it, who could ? No one else could possibly comprehend her as he did. Had they not always shared their most hidden thoughts and impressions ? From the moment they had left the house, he had responded instinctively to every change of mood and feeling, as it registered itself upon her sensitive face. He rejoiced for his own sake

in her eager interest in everything, her freshened delight in her home ; they seemed a hopeful indication for him. He had noted with special satisfaction her curiosity about certain details of the plantation work. It seemed to him keener, less easily satisfied, than of old ; she asked him many questions of distinctly practical bent. He had no doubt that, at the bottom of her affection for the Manor, lay an undeveloped instinct of utility which was not prosaic, an instinct common among girls who had been reared, as she had been, in the simplicity of country life. The Manor, for her, was the scene of a constantly moving drama, in which, sooner or later, she would become an important figure, as all the women of the family had been. Like them, she would have her part to play to keep its machinery going. She loved the place, not merely because of its associations, but because its various activities appealed to an inherited predilection. In time, no doubt, the spirit of the plantation mistress, eager to share in the control of this complicated mechanism, would awake in her.

The plantation mistress ! To Basil's mind, there was no finer type of womanhood. To be a plantation mistress, in the truest sense, was to be the source of order, of happiness, of all the refining influences of a patriarchal home. The mistress of a large plantation held in her hands the domestic control of perhaps a hundred slaves and the comfort, health, well-being of her husband and her children. She was the centre to which everything tended. The slaves looked to her for their slightest wants. They counted confidently upon her in sickness or sorrow. Her children turned to her for guidance, sympathy, unwearying love. Her husband regarded her as his mentor, indulgent of his faults yet holding before him steadily a fixed standard of purity and self-denial. And all these requirements were fulfilled so often with overflowing measure in a single in-

dividual, that it is no wonder the attitude of Southern men toward the weaker sex, so called, was generally one of reverence and devotion. Basil simply shared the common feeling of his class. He could think of no nobler, more inspiring vocation for any woman.

Lydia, it seemed to him, had entered unconsciously upon this path. Gradually, her energies would be enlisted in appropriate forms of usefulness to those about her. Subjected to the influences to which she seemed already to respond, her character, he did not doubt, would develop, finally, on lines which would bring her even closer, in sympathies and tastes, to him—a planter, heart and soul. Perhaps his devotion might appeal to her then, in spite of his deficiencies. Ah, if that could be !

Lydia lingered until the glow had quite faded out, and then turned reluctantly towards the house.

CHAPTER IX

THEY found the family gathered in the main body of the hall, awaiting the summons to tea. The hall was divided by quaint flattened archways into three sections. The largest of these formed a square apartment, with a door and windows opening on the rear verandah, which was used as a general living room. One of the smaller arms extended past a broad walnut stairway to the housekeeper's room and the kitchen ; the other led to the front door. The living room was furnished with antique sofas and chairs of mahogany upholstered in dark green leather fastened with brass-headed nails. In one corner, next the stairway, stood a tall clock with a dial plate of brass curiously engraved. There were portraits on the walls of ladies and gentlemen in costumes of different periods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some of which were ascribed to Lely or Kneller.

Lydia halted suddenly as she came into view of the group. It was one she had often pictured in memory during the past few months. No detail was changed. A swinging lamp suspended from the ceiling shed a strong but mellow light upon a spider-legged table at which was seated Ole Miss, busy with some worsted work. She was a resolute looking old lady, tall and strong, with clear-cut features, ruddy cheeks, dark, piercing eyes, and a mass of snowy hair piled high on her shapely head. A few paces from her sat the Colonel and Mr. Plunkett, absorbed in a game of chess. Curled up on a sofa at the end of the room next the library, lay Turlo, a stalwart young fellow, fast asleep after a long run with the hounds. The ex-governess, Miss Twiggs, seated bolt upright at a convenient distance

from the light, was lost in the last number of Blackwood's Magazine.

Her stiff, unbending figure looked alien here. One would imagine she must be out of touch with the genial negligence which, apparently, prevailed at the Manor. But Miss Twiggs was a bundle of contradictions. She fancied herself to be staunchly and even aggressively English, in spite of some thirty years of expatriation, and read Blackwood from cover to cover religiously, every month because, in her opinion, it reflected most accurately the militant British spirit. She clung unconsciously to certain habits and mannerisms which, to her mind, were indispensable to a well-conducted British female. Her spectacled pug nose seemed to be always sniffing suspiciously at things. Most persons thought her woodenish, unadaptable, "set" in her ways. In reality, she was a sentimental creature, easily moved by affection, and nervously anxious to conform as far as she could to her environment. Nowhere in the world—even in England—she often said to herself, were there kinder, more lovable people than the Chestons. They had made her one of themselves. When her usefulness as Lydia's governess had ended, she had not been permitted to leave the Manor, but had been told she must consider it, henceforth, her home. Her shy, timid soul was passionately grateful. She struggled hard to provide herself with new duties—all of them quite superfluous—and laboured doggedly at them with true British pertinacity. Ole Miss looked on with grim amusement and occasionally invented some trifling task for her out of sheer compassion.

Dependents like Miss Twiggs and Mr. Plunkett were familiar figures in the plantation houses. No one thought the worse of them for being pensioners upon a bounty which expected no return. It was an unwritten law of the social system that the impecunious, the improvident, even the un-

worthy must be taken care of. In every plantation house, there were guests who stayed on and on, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, and were always treated with the same consideration. The practice had its inconveniences. It was open to criticism as tending to encourage a form of pauperism. But it spread a glow of kindliness over all the relations of life. It encouraged a spirit of mutual helpfulness, of indifference to monied distinctions. The rough edges of social jealousies were worn away by its constant attrition. It was a modified form of communism, not wise perhaps, but very captivating and not without its uses as a softening influence upon an otherwise narrow, self-centred caste.

"I shall take pity on Uncle Josias, just this once," whispered Lydia to Basil. "Besides, they look so comfortable—one and all—it would be a shame to disturb them."

Turning noiselessly about, she stole back a few paces to the parlour door, and opening it softly, entered.

A wood-fire was burning brightly, and the dancing flames leaped up the sooty throat of the chimney in writhing shapes of vivid hues.

"What a beautiful blaze!" exclaimed Lydia. "There must be some green twigs among the logs. You can't get those tints from anything else. Draw up a chair, Basil. It has grown chilly—don't you think so? How nice to sit and dream by an open fire once more! Aunts had only stoves in their house, and I used to long so for a real fire."

Basil placed a large armchair for her close to the hearth, and Lydia nestled down in it with an air of lazy contentment.

"Now," she said, "we'll have a good long talk about old times."

It was quite a long talk, but Basil took but little part in it. Lydia had so much to say. Her words flowed on in a

steady stream of reminiscence. It was delightful for her to unburden herself once more to a sympathetic listener, and Basil seldom interrupted her except with an economical "yes" or "no." Suddenly, Lydia paused, and exclaimed with a laugh, "What a chatterbox I am! I have scarcely permitted you to put in a word edgeways. But there were so many things I had to say to you, Basil—things that only you would understand!"

"Don't stop," said Basil hastily, "if you knew how much I enjoyed listening to you once more—" He checked himself in confusion. Another word, and he might have betrayed his secret. Her artless confidence in his sympathy had been dangerously sweet and alluring.

"You really missed me then?" she demanded, pretending to be in doubt.

"Missed you!" he exclaimed, involuntarily bending towards her; "you can't imagine how dreary it was for me."

"Dreary, here, in the country? You were not in town; you didn't have to live with Aunts."

"But *you* were not here."

He bent still lower; his head was near hers; he laid a hand on the arm of her chair.

She glanced at him with a feeling half-mischievous, half-curious.

"Do I count for as much as all that?" she asked.

"All that, and more!" he answered quickly, and yielding to a sudden impulse, he seized the little hand that rested so confidingly near his own, and pressed it to his lips. "I love you, Lydia, with all my soul!"

He had forgotten everything. His fine resolutions, which he had thought so firm, had melted like wax in a flame. He was conscious only of the sweet oval face; of the dark eyes that glowed so lustrously in the firelight; of the slim, pliant figure reclining with easy grace in the great armchair. This

was not the child-Lydia, but a lovely young woman, unconsciously provocative, who had carelessly challenged him with a question which had set his passion free.

Lydia sprang to her feet and snatched her hand away. She stood gazing down at him, white and trembling. Her soul was in a tumult of maidenly recoil, of fierce impatience out of all proportion to Basil's offence. Most girls would have found it easy to excuse him; their pride would have been flattered, even though they had been quite indifferent to him. Her pride was wounded in its most sensitive spot. The influences which had hitherto shaped her life had developed prejudices as well as some strong inclinations unusual in young girls. The interests which absorbed her were actively inimical to the growth of those instincts which blossom forth with the dawn of womanhood in most of her sex.

From the point of view of the girls at school, she was very backward, decidedly "queer." She was not only unsophisticated and incurious, but actually scornful of their budding love-affairs, their little vanities of person and of dress. When they undertook to talk to her of this or that "fascinating" young man, her mouth showed careless disdain, her great eyes studied them with chill contempt. The only effect of their confidences was to excite in her a keener sense of the pettiness of their tastes, their ambitions, as contrasted with the strong, virile impulses which stirred her so pleasurably. What was one of their insipid flirtations compared with the keen enjoyment she had so often felt in a wild gallop after the hounds, the mad plunging of a canoe in a gale? They actually set her against "beaux" as a class and made her intolerant of the idea of love as they construed it. She was as shy as any nun; as jealous of her liberty as a young savage.

No pretty girl can long remain unconscious of the admi-

ration she excites, but Lydia, from the first, had been more or less impatient of attentions from young men. Few of them seemed to her as interesting as her horse or her dog. She could not bear the thought of their gaining the least influence over her. Basil was the only one of them all in whose favour she had made an exception, and much of the confidence she felt in him was due not merely to habit but to the fact that he seemed as indifferent as herself to such nonsense and was not likely ever to annoy her in that way. And now, he had shown himself to be like those others, those smirking dandies, who flattered themselves they might be able to please her! He had even gone farther than any of them had ever ventured; he had actually dared to lay hands on her! He loved her; that was his excuse. Of course he loved her. Had they not always been fond of each other? But this was different. Love, to her mind, meant nothing more than strong affection. She felt the presence, in Basil's act, of a rough, importunate force that frightened and incensed her. She would not yield to it. No one should take her captive. And Basil, of all people! Had he not been the most submissive of her subjects?

"I hate you! I hate you!" she said suddenly, with a stamp of her foot. In a flash, she had turned from him and was gone.

CHAPTER X

Basil sat a long time, with bowed head, before the fire, gazing vacantly at the curling flames. Lydia's anger seemed to him perfectly natural. It was precisely what he might have expected. In a moment of folly, he had brought upon himself the very disaster he had dreaded. He suffered, not only from the knowledge that he had shocked and wounded her, but from shame at his weakness. He had fancied himself so strong and at the first moment of temptation, he had succumbed as feebly as any child. Why shouldn't she hate him? He hated himself. And even if she could bring herself to forgive him, would he not be, henceforth, another individual to her? Her childish confidence in him was gone; she would at once begin to weigh, to judge, him. He could not bear the thought of meeting her eyes, no longer trustful and affectionate, but critical, speculative, perhaps with a gleam of scorn in them.

The tea-bell rang, and Basil joined the group in the hall. Lydia was not there. The Colonel told him she had decided to stay upstairs with her mother. He was glad of her absence; it gave him a little respite from the verdict he dreaded to read in her gaze. At the tea table, he bore his part in the conversation but lamely, and breathed a sigh of relief when, at last, after a long political discussion between the Colonel and Mr. Plunkett in the library over their pipes, he was enabled to say good-night and retire to his room. But the night proved a weary vigil for him. His excited brain was crowded with tormenting fancies, and he found it impossible to sleep. He thought of Lydia in all her varying moods and always came back to the one idea that his own

rashness had cut him off from her irrevocably. At the very moment of his discovery of the nature of his feeling for her, he had flung away his only claim upon her favour. It was barely possible he might have won her, in the absence of any stronger claim, by gradual approaches through the medium of her habitual confidence and affection, but now——

In a fever of restlessness, he rose at daybreak, and dressing hastily, went down into the garden, hoping to find refreshment in the cool morning air. As it happened, he turned into the avenue of pines which Lydia and he had trod so happily the previous day. There had been a heavy dew, and as the sun crept towards the horizon, crimsoning the eastern sky, the jonquils and violets, blossoming on each side of his path, lifted their petals lazily as though drowsy from deep potations over night. There was a delicious freshness in the damp breath of dawn. Tiny drops of water glittered like diamonds and rubies on the taller blades of grass. The robins hopping about on the lawn seemed to have just come from a bath, so spruce and bright was their red and gray plumage. Profound stillness reigned at first, but it was broken shortly by the crowing of cocks and the lowing of cattle. A vague murmur from the Quarter announced that the negroes were astir.

Basil drew near the house, intending to return to his room and dress for breakfast. The sounds of shutters thrown open, overhead, arrested his steps at the edge of the verandah. Looking up, he saw Lydia at one of the windows. Fortunately, she was gazing out upon the lawn and did not discover him standing almost beneath her. She had thrown on a dressing-gown and hastened to the window for a glimpse of the fresh morning beauty of the garden. Her richly tinted hair fell in curly disorder about her shoulders, and her eyes were still heavy with sleep. With elbows resting on

the sill, she leaned well out of the window, her slender hands buried in the vagrant tresses which had tumbled about her face.

The birds were now in full chorus. She listened intently to learn if she could still identify them by their distinguishing notes, as she had been able to do before leaving home. Yes, she remembered them all—the steady, monotonous chirp of blackbirds swarming in the Lombardy poplars; the musical warble of house wrens perched along the roof; the sweet song, all too brief, of thrushes in distant thickets—a song of liquid, refreshing melody, that always reminded her of the murmur of a brook on a hot summer day. Her face brightened. She was really at home! A few moments before, she had been dreaming she was still at her Aunts'.

Basil watched her with a keen sense of loss. He no longer had any part in her enjoyment. If she thought of him, it would be with a feeling of resentment, of alienation. Fearful of attracting her notice, he stepped noiselessly upon the verandah and entered the house.

When they encountered each other at the breakfast table, Lydia's manner was shy and constrained. Throughout the meal, she eyed him furtively, but looked hastily away whenever their glances met. Basil was on thorns. He dare not speak to her lest she repulse him curtly even in the presence of others. He recalled the eager desire she had expressed the day before to visit the Indian Spring in quest of arbutus, and thought, with a pang, that she would no longer welcome his companionship on such excursions. They implied an intimacy which, it seemed to him, was impossible, now that he had destroyed her trust in him. If she were merely cool to him instead of being actively hostile—was not that more than he had reason to expect? Fortunately, the others at table were talkative, and no one noticed their mutual embarrassment. When they finally rose, it was a relief to each of

them to find themselves at opposite ends of the room. Lydia had started upstairs when Basil reached the hall.

An hour later, Lydia appeared in the library, where Basil was vainly endeavouring to read a book he had found absorbing but a few days before. She was in a dark green riding-habit and held a small whip in one hand. She glanced at Basil hesitatingly, and suddenly, seemed to come to a resolve.

"I am going to church, Basil," she said. "It is a splendid morning for a gallop; will you come with me?"

It was Sunday; he had forgotten that. He rose, slowly, uncertain whether she was in earnest. Could she have forgiven him? Was it possible she meant to ignore what had happened, to admit him to her confidence once more?

Hardly that, but affection was stirring in her; she could not banish the memory of their pleasant companionship; she was moved by the inclination of habit which contended strongly with her sense of injury. A spice of curiosity also tempted her. The love of which Basil had spoken as if it explained his new relation to her might be worthy of consideration, after all. She began to feel the fascination of its mystery, its possible danger, and danger always attracted her. It had clearly exerted a powerful influence over him. How else could he, who had always been so sober, so sensible, so self-possessed have suddenly turned silly? Could those moon-sick girls whom she had so often derided be right? Was there an intoxication in some kinds of love that made people foolish? Had it been her misfortune to turn Basil's head? It *was* a misfortune; if he wanted her as much as he had seemed to want her, he was doomed to a heavy disappointment. She would never yield to him—never!

Her anger cooled at thought of the grief she might have to cause him—poor old Basil! It would be a kindness to

him—so she innocently persuaded herself—to find out, if she could, what his real condition was, so that she might be the better able to nip the thing in the bud without hurting him too much. She knew very well how to worm secrets out of him; he could never hide anything from her. In her ignorance, she had no idea of the motive that really prompted her. It was the passion in his avowal that attracted her most of all. Her scorn of sentiment and romance was but the superficial product of her girlish intolerance. The woman was waking in her, though she did not know it. Her ardent nature had in it depths that she little suspected; for the first time, they were stirred by an elemental force. She was quivering on the brink of the great discovery, which comes to all women, sooner or later, of the special power, the unimagined capacities of their sex.

Basil's hopes, which he had distrusted from the first, faded suddenly when they set out on horseback for church. Lydia did not start with him at once, as she would have done the day before, but waited for the family coach in which Ole Miss, the Colonel, Mr. Plunkett and Miss Twiggs always went to church. Evidently, Basil reasoned, she did not wish to be alone with him. He was confirmed in this belief by the fact that, on the way, she curbed in Knight, so as to keep close to the lumbering coach, and it was only when they fell behind, that she was able to indulge herself in the coveted gallop. The fact was, she was still a trifle shy of Basil and was cautiously feeling her way. Besides, she had no notion of admitting him to favour again too readily; he must be punished—just a little. But Basil feared she meant to set him at a distance, to make him feel that he was reduced to the ranks of a more or less formal acquaintance. It would have been less unkind, he thought, had she avoided him altogether; he would at least have been spared the bitter disappointment which had followed

so swiftly the offer of pardon she had seemed to hold out to him.

The coach wound its way slowly through a silent wood which was radiant with the tender beauty of spring. Its misty gray recesses were brightened with the golden tints of the spice bush, the pink of the Judas tree, the red or silvery green of the budding leaves of oaks. At length, the soft notes of the church bell were heard close at hand. The last stroke had just died away, when the coach brought up at the door, and old Cæsar, hat in hand, descended from his perch to let down the carpeted steps for Ole Miss.

Old Winton was one of the earlier colonial churches of which a few still remain in quiet villages or secluded country neighbourhoods of Tidewater Maryland. With their ivy-clad walls of mottled brick and their quaintly shaped, moss-covered roofs, they bear a family resemblance to the old plantation houses, the ancient graveyards, the abandoned roadside inns—the only memorials now left of conditions long since obsolete. The church stood in a large enclosure shaded by venerable oaks. In one corner of the church-yard, overlooking a smiling valley, nestled the Rectory, a hip-roofed, rambling house of the same red and gray brick, highly glazed, that had been used in building the church. Attached to it was a glebe farm of a hundred acres or more. Beyond it, lining the public road, were a few straggling houses descending a steep hill to a stream. On the banks of the latter, stood a mill weather-boarded with shingles, gray with age, which gave the name Winton Mills to the hamlet. Why the plural was used, no one could tell; there had been but one mill from time immemorial.

Basil helped Lydia to alight, and having fastened their horses, escorted her to the family pew. Only Uncle Josias was missing. He had loitered behind at the door, to exchange bits of gossip with his cronies collected in groups

on each side of the narrow brick walk and forming a gauntlet through which the worshippers must pass. At these Sunday conferences, Mr. Plunkett obtained material for piquant conversation for the rest of the week.

Lydia was very devout throughout the service. Religion was no mere abstraction for her. Her belief was vivid, her creed a genuine thing. Had she not been so joyous a young creature, she might easily have become a devotee. She accepted the tenets of her church as they had been taught her with eager faith. They seemed to her very beautiful and real. She was too young yet to analyse, to investigate, to doubt. No serious grief had ever disturbed her; she had suffered no shock to her unquestioning trust and confidence in God who had been so good. Basil watched her with a new sense of her simplicity, her utter unconsciousness. More than ever, it seemed to him indelicate to whisper passion to this virginal mind.

On the way back to the Manor, Lydia again measured Knight's pace by that of the coach, but not so carefully, and once she checked him to a walk, and then set off for a longer gallop than any she had yet permitted herself. After dinner, she turned to Basil instinctively, to accompany her, as had been his habit, to the housekeeper's room for the Sunday afternoon services for the slaves. These were always conducted by Ole Miss, except when a clergyman, or perhaps the bishop of the diocese, was staying at the Manor. On this occasion, Ole Miss was seated at one end of the room, with Bible and Prayer Book on a table beside her. She wore the dress in which she had appeared at church—a heavy black silk, with collar and cuffs of lace, the former fastened by a cameo brooch. On her head, rested an elaborate structure of cambric and ribbons. As she sat thus, stiff and straight, facing a compact assemblage of dusky worshippers, she had a benevolently dominating air. The

negroes all knew it would be unwise to nod or show other signs of inattention in her presence. Nothing escaped her keen, searching eyes. For them, she was the embodiment of vigilant authority, the meter out of punishments, the dispenser of rewards.

Ole Miss read a chapter from the Bible and then asked the usual questions from the Church Catechism, which were answered by young and old in a quaint sing-song. This was followed by Evening Service, the prayers ending with unctuous "Amens" from the negroes, after which Ole Miss "gave out" several hymns. These were sung with great spirit, even Aunt Sukey and Uncle Ike, the aged story-teller, wit and oracle of the Quarter, joining in with their cracked and piping trebles. There was one hymn that was never omitted, the hymn which, at "Ole Marster," the Judge's, death-bed, had been sung by the slaves assembled to take leave of him. When the familiar strain began, Ole Miss always closed her eyes to hide the moisture that gathered in them, and sometimes, she brushed away a tear. She was not given to emotion. Her sturdy spirit was impatient of weakness in herself or others, and by many, she was regarded as hard and unsympathetic. In reality, her nature was as strong in its affections as in its courage and self-will. The negroes feared her, but they loved her as well. They could neither deceive nor disobey her with impunity, but they knew they could count upon her ministrations in suffering or distress.

When the hymns were ended, Ole Miss delivered a short impromptu homily, and then addressed each member of the group in turn, inquiring into various ailments, complaints, transgressions. Some were admonished; others were promised indulgence or help. In all, was renewed the sense of firm, beneficent control.

Lydia always watched her grandmother admiringly on these occasions. She seemed so strong, so capable, so wise.

Occasionally, however, she was moved to intercede at the muttered entreaty of some delinquent or to beg some special favour for a wheedling petitioner like old Aunt Sukey. Ole Miss listened with a sternly judicial air, but often ended by granting her request. Even she could not resist Lydia's coaxing. The negroes knew it was the surest road to her favour, but they were shrewd enough to use it sparingly. It was a last resort when all else failed.

As they left the room, Basil, feeling he had little to gain by staying longer, said,

"I must go home, Lydia; good-bye."

"Must you, really?" she asked, glancing at him quickly, with a slightly satirical smile—she had noted reluctance in his voice. "You forget our visit to the Indian Spring."

Basil's face lit up with glad surprise. She still wished him to go with her. He was not to be excluded altogether from privileged attendance on her. But why had she softened so suddenly? Had she worked out for herself the problem of his conduct in the parlour, and realised that his rashness implied no violence, no menace, but was, in fact, a dedication of himself to her, a declaration of more absolute fealty? No; it were folly to imagine her mind had ripened so quickly. She was still as ignorant as before, no doubt, of the true nature of his feeling for her, and it was probably a mere impulse of generosity, or returning affection, or longing for familiar companionship that had influenced her. But it was a great gain for him. His heart beat rapidly at the thought that she had given him the opportunity of winning back some portion of her trust.

"Spend another night with us," added Lydia—there was a trace of mischief in her voice, but Basil missed it—"I would rather go in the morning; it is always so beautiful, then, at the Spring."

It had been hard work to bring herself to the point of

showing him so much favour, but how was she to satisfy herself if she continued to hold aloof? And the Indian Spring was precisely the spot she would have chosen, because of its seclusion. Here, she could interrogate him at her leisure, secure from interruption. What a cunning inquisitor she meant to be! He should be made to tell her everything without suspecting her purpose. She had not only the confidence due to uniform success in probing his thoughts, but the faith which lurks in the heart of every woman in her ability to "manage" any member of the clumsier sex.

Basil accepted her invitation gladly, never doubting that it had been prompted chiefly by a magnanimity which was as sweet to him as it was unexpected.

CHAPTER XI

When they set out shortly after breakfast next morning, Basil rejoiced to find that Lydia was as bright and as unreserved as she had ever been. She laughed and chatted with him as freely as though no cloud had arisen between them. What a fortunate escape for him! It seemed little short of marvelous. He would take care not to risk his happiness again. How could he have imagined he was walking straight into the peril he meant to avoid?

Their path ran along one side of a field bordering on the banks of the cove. It followed the zigzag line of an old "worm" fence overgrown with locust bushes, briars and trumpet creeper. The latter, in a few months, would deck the fence-row with clusters of bright crimson flowers. The path brought them, at the end of a mile or more, to a deep, wooded ravine from which a small brook flowed into the head waters of the cove. Turning into this ravine, they followed the windings of the stream which carried them deeper and deeper into the Manor woods. At last, rounding a sudden bend of the brook, they came to their destination, the Indian Spring.

It was a limpid pool at the foot of a great mottled beech, which stood in a cleft of a steep hill-side. Tall elms, from which hung festoons of grapevines and Virginia creeper, formed a natural arbour above the gorge. Loose stones had been used to dam the spring. They were green with moss, and from their crevices sprang tiny ferns. The spring owed its name to the fact that the spot had once been the seat of an Indian tribe. Stone tomahawks and arrow heads, bits

of rude pottery and other relics were occasionally turned up in ploughing the adjacent lands.

The face of the hill was gay with nodding anemones and a prim array of snowy bloodroot, the waxen blossoms still unsheathed. Here and there, patches of olive green among the dead leaves announced the presence of arbutus hiding its pink and white charms coyly under a Quakerish garb.

Lydia sprang eagerly up the nearest slope and began to pluck the blossoms from their hiding-places.

"Let's see who will get the finer bouquet, Basil!" she exclaimed.

They bent over side by side, their hands often touching as they searched among the leaves. Basil was keenly conscious now of his danger. At times, he could scarce resist the temptation to capture those swift, elusive little hands as they flashed so provokingly near. It was trying to feel her breath upon his cheek, to be so close to her that her lithe figure sometimes brushed against him. Once, she caught him by the shoulder, to save herself from falling and leaned against him, for a moment, with all her weight. It was all he could do to keep from clasping her in his arms.

Lydia was not thinking of him. The subtle charm of the spot possessed her. Her veins were filled with the glad elixir of spring. Every now and then, she paused in her task and stood erect to drink in the damp fragrance of the earth, the perfume of the arbutus, the freshness of the dew-laden leaves.

"There, Basil," she exclaimed, at last, holding out to him a huge bunch of arbutus, "see what a lot I've gathered. Why," she added, with a laughing glance at his meagre handful, "you have hardly any. What a lazy fellow!"

It was true. He had merely made a show of activity. His real occupation had been watching her.

Lydia seated herself in a loop of grapevine that hung

from one of the elms near the spring and began to cull the choicer sprays.

"These are for Mamma," she explained.

Basil, rather shamefacedly, added his contribution to the heap in her lap. He found a convenient seat on a large boulder on the opposite side of the spring, from which he had a good view of her. They were silent for some time. Lydia was too busy to talk, and Basil asked nothing better than to gaze at her as she swung, apparently oblivious of him, to and fro. How delightful it was here beside her, in the great, quiet wood! The sunlight, filtering through the budding foliage, traced fugitive patterns of light and shade on the web of interlacing roots at their feet. Above and beyond them, stretched the blackish depths of wooded slopes. In the meadow, just below, rose patches of mandrake like tiny green umbrellas planted close together in the sod. Farther down, a dense hedge of honeysuckle clambering over a network of green-briar and blackberry bushes screened the stream, but at another point, there was a break in a thicket of alders and magnolias which disclosed a glimpse of steel-gray water touched with rose and changing into a delicate green near the opposite shore. Branch willows growing along the margin, drooped their long wands, studded with yellow catkins, close to the glistening current which danced with soft, soothing murmur over a bed of stones.

Basil's gaze, without his knowing it, grew rapt. Lydia's total unconsciousness intensified his sense of charm. She seemed to him, as she swayed dreamily back and forth, to have a natural, primitive grace in harmony with the wild beauty of the spot.

Unluckily, Lydia happened to glance at him just as the admiration in his eyes shone keenest. It was the way he had looked at her the other night in the parlour! She sprang

up hastily and stood facing him with a forbidding air. The trial of strength which she had sought was at hand. But it was not as she had intended. He had taken her by surprise again. There had been no time, no opportunity for her to set in motion her insidious plan of attack. It was he who had taken the initiative, putting her on the defensive. She did not doubt that unless she acted quickly, he would be quite capable of repeating the folly that had been so odious to her. Thank goodness, she knew the symptoms in him now, and could check him in time.

"What is the matter with you, Basil?" she demanded, shortly.

"Nothing," he answered, confused.

"There is something!" she insisted, "else, why do you stare at me so?"

"Forgive me," he said, "I couldn't help it."

It was of no use; her beauty mastered him. He had set himself too hard a task of self-repression.

Lydia tossed her head, impatiently.

"Couldn't help it!" she exclaimed; "how can you be so absurd? One would think you were a child! You must help it, if we are to be friends. Understand that, clearly. I never dreamed of such rudeness from you."

"Rudeness!" he cried, "surely, Lydia, you know me better. As if I could ever have a thought that was really rude to you! Ah, if you could but know how anxious I am not to offend; how gladly I would do anything to make you happy!"

"You have an odd way of showing it," she retorted, mockingly, but with just a trace of inquisitiveness. She was wondering what explanation he could have to offer.

"You wouldn't think it odd," said Basil, quick to take advantage of her apparent willingness to listen to him, "if you knew. It only seems odd because you don't under-

stand." If he could make her understand! He must enlighten her if there were any way of doing it without offending her still more. It was his only hope of placating her, of excusing himself. "It is love, Lydia—nothing else—but a kind of love that is new to me as to you. Ah, yes, it is rude, but not in the way you mean. It's—it's something that grips one and drags him on roughly, whether he will or no. It came upon me first in the canoe: I tried to struggle with it—I knew it would startle and annoy you, that it would seem to you impertinent, silly—but I failed. It is stronger than I am; it *will* break out in spite of everything I can do."

"Strange!" she said, puckering her brow with a sagely meditative air, "you never used to feel that way."

"You are different, so different!" he cried. "You have bewitched me, I think."

"Well!" cried Lydia, with an accent of indignation, which a sudden gleam of laughter in her eyes belied, "the idea of trying to shift the blame to me! A witch, am I? What next, I wonder!"

"I withdraw the obnoxious word," said Basil, smiling. He was beginning to feel somewhat encouraged. "Suppose I say you are fascinating? And really, you have cast a spell on me."

Lydia gave him an ironical glance. So, she was fascinating! Why had he not discovered this before? He might have spared both him and her all this bother. She could have told him, long ago, she didn't want to be "fascinating" to him or to anybody else, in the way he meant. There could be no longer any doubt about it; she *had* turned his head. What a pity! Did he love her so very much? Would he suffer a great deal? She was dismayed to find herself wishing he would. It was a cruel wish, and yet, there was pleasure in it. Pshaw! Was she also growing silly?

What had she to do with this sort of thing? She felt a sudden flash of anger against Basil for having brought her to such a pass. After all, it meant but one thing—the sacrifice of her darling independence. Basil wanted her to marry him—that was evident. Marriage meant bondage. She was determined to be always free. What was the use of beating about the bush any longer? She must bring him to his senses.

"If you think you can catch me with flattery," she said with a touch of asperity, which she could have wished were more marked, "you are very much mistaken."

"Flattery!" exclaimed Basil, his passion breaking through all restraint, "you wouldn't think of flattery, if you could know what I feel. Can't you understand this, Lydia—that you are all the world to me; that there can never be any happiness so great as that I dare not hope for—the happiness of knowing you care as much for me? I thought there was nothing I couldn't do for you. I was wrong. There is one thing I cannot do, and that is, to hide this new feeling which offends you. I meant to hide it. I said to myself I would wait. I am very humble about you, though I have not seemed so. I knew you cared for me, but not in the way I wished. I feared you might never care. My only chance, it seemed to me, lay in a devotion which might gradually win upon you. Some day, it might, I hoped, be given to me to prove that no such love as mine could be found elsewhere—a love anticipating your slightest wish, enveloping you with a tenderness that could never tire, denying even itself lest it cause you harm. Fool that I was, I dreamed of guarding you against yourself! It was possible, I thought, if you discovered my desire, that you might be moved by sympathy, by the affection you had felt for me ever since you were a little child, to give yourself to me rashly, without knowing your own heart. Every consideration

urged me to silence—self-interest, my sense of honour, and strongest of all, my solicitude for you. Well—you know what has happened. I am guilty of all I resolved so firmly not to do. I blurted out the love I meant to conceal. I forgot what was due to you and was conscious only of the mad impulse that swept me on. I had but one slender chance, as I have said; it was to wait, to suffer, to strive silently for your approval against any odds, in the hope that the time might come when it would not seem to you so presumptuous if I asked you to be my wife. I flung that chance away. The utmost I could ask of you, now, is that you bear with me for old friendship's sake; that, if I seem mad and foolish, you will take pity and say to yourself, 'He can't help it, and he means no harm.'"

Lydia glanced at him indulgently; she was tempted to say more. A wave of feeling that was not all compassion swept over her. This kind of love might be silly, but it was not trivial nor tame. There was force in it, a force that gave it dignity, even to her contumelious view. Her heart throbbed strongly in response to Basil's unconscious eloquence. She knew, now, what she had been so curious to learn; she had gauged the character and intensity of the feeling which had driven him, as he had said, against his will. It was even stronger than she had imagined. And she had inspired it! She! A gratified sense of recovered dominion, of a new, more despotic power came to her. Her delicate nostrils quivered; she threw her little head back proudly. Bear with him? Why, of course. She need never fear him now. Whenever he looked at her in that way again, she would know he was only offering her renewed submission. Take pity on him? A dangerous impulse stirred her. Would it be too much to give him what he did not ask, what he had said he no longer had any thought of asking? Basil had been right in thinking that sympathy might make her rash.

After all, she did love him dearly. They might be very happy, if——

She started suddenly and glanced at him, with a look of alarm. For a moment, her precious liberty had been in peril; captivity had seemed no longer so ugly a thing. Was it possible she had been on the point of bending her proud neck to the yoke? How often she had told herself she would never be poor-spirited enough to utter at the altar that hateful promise to obey! No: pity—it was only pity, of course—would never carry her that far. But it might console him to learn that she would have preferred him to anyone else. There could be no harm in telling him that.

"It wouldn't be so bad to be your wife," she said with innocent gravity, "I couldn't care for anyone more than I care for you—I couldn't really. But it is out of the question, Basil. Years ago, I made up my mind I could never marry. I'm not like most girls, as you know. The thought of giving up my liberty has always been insupportable. It would be a mockery for me to promise obedience to anyone; sooner or later, I would rebel. No matter how much I might love you, I would pine for freedom, and even if you tamed me at last, I could never forgive you for clipping my wings. We are ever so much happier as we are—you see that, don't you?"

To Basil, there was something whimsical yet touching in her words. How little she knew of life and what it might have in store for her! A girl of scarce eighteen, with the gift of beauty, of charm which would attract to her shoals of lovers, and "years ago," she had decided never to marry! A year or two from now, and she, herself, would wonder at her blindness. God grant that her awakening to the sense of her power and its peril might not be rude! In her ignorant self-confidence, she was unique. What other girl

of her age could have so deluded herself with the idea that she was proof against the strongest instinct of her sex? Happy the man who should know the joy of opening her eyes!

He sighed as he thought that if she never cared for any one more than she cared for him, she might actually make good her unconscious boast. She pitied him; she still loved him, in her way; he was forgiven. Ought he not to be grateful? And yet, the fact that she was willing to tolerate the idea of marrying him as something that would have been quite feasible had she not been such a little rebel, awakened wild thoughts.

"You may change your mind after awhile," he said with forced humour to hide the tumult in him, "if you do, remember I have a prior claim."

"I shan't forget," she said with a laugh, "and now, we're going to be reasonable, are we not?"

"No!" he answered impetuously, "I can't be reasonable while I am near you. I no longer wish to be reasonable. It has gone too far, Lydia—the sight of you makes me drunk!"

Lydia looked shocked, but in reality, her heart felt a thrill of delight. She had tasted the joy all women feel in the abandon of a passion that will tolerate no compromises, no evasion. She was glad Basil *would* persist in his folly.

Basil saw only the deceptive cloud on her face, and his own face grew downcast.

"There is one thing I can do, Lydia," he said, rising and gripping the edge of the boulder, as if to steady himself, "if it would make you freer, happier, I can go away. Whether I were 'reasonable' or not, would make no difference, then. It would be hard for me, but not so hard as to stay here, feeling that my presence was a plague to you."

"Go away!" she cried, startled, "but I would miss you, Basil!"

There was a note of pain in her voice that caused his heart to leap.

She hesitated a moment, and added with shy archness,

"I'll try to put up with your eccentricities, if you will stay."

"Lydia!" he cried, taking an eager step towards her, his face aglow.

"There—no nearer, please!" she exclaimed hastily, putting out both hands as if to ward him off. She felt a strong inclination to spring away from him into the woods. But it would never do to let him think she was afraid. "You've given me a headache," she added nervously, "it is tiresome talking of one's self. Leave me for a little while; I want to be alone. Take this to the house and put it into water for me, won't you?" She tossed him the bunch of arbutus as she spoke. "I'm going to have a look at the deer."

She turned on her heel rather precipitately and disappeared in the shrubbery that bordered the brook.

Basil stood gazing after her for some time, with pain and longing in his eyes. Her avoidance of him, her evident panic convinced him he had been woefully mistaken. She was impressionable, affectionate—nothing more. What madness to have dreamed for an instant that his passion had found some echo in her heart!

CHAPTER XII

THE deer range was a large enclosure of woodland and meadow skirting the edges of a swamp through which the brook ascended gradually to its source. The shade of a labyrinth of tangled shrubbery and trees protected the stream and its many springs in summer and kept its banks luxuriantly green. At frequent intervals, little rills crept slowly through the bog to join the brook, occasionally forming large, semi-stagnant pools. It was possible to cross the marsh only at certain points where cart-roads had been made of logs on which earth and gravel had been heaped, but one might still follow the course of the stream along rude embankments at its side which had been thrown up in cutting for it an easy channel to drain the adjacent fields. On the crests of these embankments, ran narrow paths beaten hard by the deer and by foxes, rabbits, opossums and raccoons, which found comparatively safe refuge in the swamp.

Lydia took the left hand path going up stream. In a few minutes, she came to a road that wound up the face of a slope covered by a grove of fine chestnut trees. This road, she knew, led to a pleasant spot where she had often loitered. Turning into it, she climbed to the crest of the ridge and emerged into a little glade, protected by a hedge of brambles and sassafras bushes, from which sprang, here and there, a noble poplar or beech. Near the centre, stood a knotty black gum of great size spreading a canopy of tiny red leaves which would soon be as lustrously green as those of an oleander. One of its gnarled branches, bent close to the ground, formed a rude armchair in which Lydia seated herself, with a sigh of relief.

She was really tired—not physically but mentally. Her interview with Basil had involved an unaccustomed kind of exercise which had taxed her heavily. She was not used to worrying herself with questions of feeling, of motive. Her life had been almost wholly objective. She had been wont to receive and absorb impressions, not to analyse either her own thoughts and wishes or those of others. She had been forced, for the first time, to think seriously, to grapple with a problem which, while it had interested her deeply, had caused her brain to throb with a sense of hard labour. Here, she could shake off the burden. She was alone in the heart of a sequestered wood, remote from disturbing influences. No one could "bother" her, here, with intrusive claims upon her attention. There were only the trees, the blue sky, the scent of the pines, the furtive watchfulness of a hidden animal life that was as anxious as she to be avoided. The spirit of the woods revived in her with refreshing force. All that had happened between her and Basil faded swiftly into comparative insignificance. The old lawless instincts sprang up again within her, hot and strong. How glad she was she had escaped him, how thankful she had not yielded to her momentary impulse of compassion! She was still free, free as air. More than ever, she was resolved to remain so. For the moment, she was again but a careless child, exulting in her liberty.

There was so much here to give her active fancy play. Immediately beneath her, at the foot of the slope, looming darkly through the foliage, lay the swamp, drear and still. To the left, a glimpse was had through a gap in the shrubbery of a bit of "old field," overgrown with sedge and stunted pines, which, like the swamp, was desolate yet alluring. This lonely waste, once cultivated but long since deserted, was believed by the negroes to be a favourite resort of ghosts. There was not a negro in the neighbourhood

who would have approached the spot after nightfall. Even during the day, the "old field" was avoided by the more timorous.

Lydia amused herself by recalling the various stories of uncanny adventures which the Manor negroes professed to have met with, not only here, but in other portions of the swamp. How she wished she could feel the thrill of some such experience! But try as she might, she had never been able to see a really satisfactory ghost, although her imagination had played her some odd pranks at times. Here, if anywhere, she might hope to obtain a glimpse of one. This savage solitude, in which she could fancy Nature speaking to her confidentially, in whispers, seemed the very abode of mystery, of shadows, of muffled voices. A dreamy sense of unreality stole upon her. She leaned back against the trunk of the gum, half closing her eyes with a drowsiness due to the soothing influences of the spot. The only sounds that reached her were such as harmonised with the murmurous quiet all about her—the low rustling of deer in neighbouring coverts; the hoarse cawing of crows from the tops of trees in the swamp; the faint call of ploughmen to their horses in distant fields; the monotonous croaking of frogs in the marsh.

Suddenly, a mischievous fancy seized her. There was a spot in the swamp known as the "marl pit," which she had long been curious about. It was a large pond, made by excavating for marl, which bore an even more sinister reputation among the negroes than the sedge field. It was said to have no bottom—at least none that any plummet had ever sounded—and to be capable of sucking into its depths any creature who was rash enough to venture near it. Lydia had often sought to learn its location, but none of the negroes could be induced to tell her, much less to pilot her to it. They always sought to dissuade her by narrating

blood-curdling stories of the place—stories which had their origin in a single incident, the drowning of a couple of negro boys who had tumbled into the pond while angling for catfish.

The pool was believed to have been "laid under a spell" by a reputed wizard, an old slave named Manuel, who was held in great dread by ignorant whites as well as blacks. Manuel lived alone in the swamp, in charge of the deer. He never denied to his fellow-slaves that he had "conjured" the marl pit; on the contrary, he did his utmost to encourage the delusion. The sly old scamp had a practical reason for wishing it to be avoided. It abounded in the choicest catfish, for which he found ready sale in the county town.

Lydia felt that she had an excellent opportunity, now, to satisfy her curiosity. She was alone; there was no one to deter or to mislead her. A spice of adventure in the enterprise tempted her strongly, and she was on the point of moving when her interest was excited by a doe who had thrust her slender muzzle through a screen of bushes directly in front of her, and was regarding her with a pair of large, soft eyes whose gaze expressed a timid curiosity. Lydia remained perfectly still, and presently, other heads appeared. At length, the branches parted, and a noble buck, the sultan of the herd, stepped proudly forth into the glade. His subjects followed, one by one, pausing at every few steps to glance about them with a watchful air.

The peaceful charm of this scene was broken suddenly by the report of a gun close at hand. The deer bounded off in a panic, and Lydia, startled, sprang to her feet. As she did so, a redbird tumbled from the tree overhead to the ground, a few paces from her. It had fallen upon a cluster of white violets, and lay there, staining the snowy blossoms with its blood as it fluttered in its death-throes. There

was a rustling noise in a thicket to the right of Lydia, and a moment later, a handsome Irish setter leaped from the bushes. He was followed, almost immediately, by a young man in a hunting suit of drab corduroy, who held in one hand a gun still smoking from the recent discharge. On seeing Lydia, he recoiled with a cry of alarm.

"Good Heavens, Miss Cheston!" he exclaimed. "Have I hurt you?"

"Oh, no!" said Lydia, recognising Oswald Reeve. She received him with a rebuking air. Of course, he did not know that he was poaching in her father's deer park, where no one was permitted to hunt at this season of the year, but she must challenge him for shooting the poor little redbird, which was not a sportsman's proper game. Besides, he had killed it sitting. Lydia had been carefully instructed by her father in gunning ethics, the cardinal rule of which, in the Colonel's neighbourhood, was strictly prohibitory of the shooting of birds when not on the wing.

"How could you kill that pretty little creature?" she demanded. "And sitting, too."

"It *was* a mean thing to do," said Oswald, much embarrassed, "but he was such a handsome fellow, I—I thought you might like to have his wings for a hat."

The excuse was a lame one, and a fib besides. He had not thought of Lydia at all, but had fired from a mere chance impulse. Bending over hurriedly, as he spoke, he picked up the bird and offered it to her. Lydia refused it with a gesture of repugnance. "I saw it die," she said with a slight tremor in her voice.

Oswald confusedly thrust the bird into one of the large pockets of his coat, in the hasty desire to hide it from her, and with a bow which was awkward, for him, turned to leave her. To his surprise, Lydia laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"You can't get off so easily," she said with a smile, "I take you prisoner for trespassing in our woods. Your punishment is to be presented to Papa, and thanked for taking such good care of me on the steamer."

Oswald, flushing with pleasure, signified his acquiescence. Her easy friendliness, so unlooked for under the circumstances, increased his confusion.

"But I forgot," said Lydia, with a doubtful air, "I was about to go in search of the marl-pit—would you mind coming with me?"

"Of course not," said Oswald, promptly. He had no idea whither the search might lead him, but he was ready to go anywhere with her—the farther the better.

"I have always longed to find it," she explained, "because of the queer stories that are told about it. It is somewhere near, I am sure, and this is such a good chance. It is said to be a dreadful place," she added, with a pretence of seriousness. "The negroes declare it is 'conjured'; that people who go too near it are dragged into it by some magic power and drowned."

"Perhaps its banks are miry," suggested Oswald, laughing. He was regaining something of his usual ease.

"Oh, no! That is too tame an explanation. There is really an old conjuror living near it, who admits having charmed it. I hope you are not afraid of conjurors."

She questioned him with a bantering glance.

"Not the least in the world. I know something of the gentry. There were some East Indian conjurors in London with whom I scraped acquaintance. They were very harmless, I assure you, and were even kind enough to teach me a few of their tricks."

"You must show them to me!" cried Lydia, clapping her hands in delight, "perhaps I can learn them. If I succeed, I'll frighten old Manuel out of his boots. What

fun that would be! He is only a clumsy, every-day sort of conjuror, of course."

Oswald willingly promised to impart the desired instruction, and Lydia, her eyes gleaming with the spirit of adventure, started off. Retracing her steps down the cart-road to the banks of the brook, she again took the left side going up-stream. They were forced by the narrowness of the path to proceed in Indian file. Lydia led the way, Oswald came next, and the setter, having been cautioned by his master, obediently brought up the rear.

The swamp became even wilder as they advanced. At places, they had to thread their way through dense thickets or climb over huge, fallen trees, with a perfect abattis of limbs and branches. Frequently, they found it easier to leave the embankment and betake themselves to the marsh. Here, it was necessary to step with the utmost care, and often, to spring from one to another of the little tussocks of earth and matted grass which rose, like tiny islands, from the bog. Sometimes, when the water was sufficiently shallow, they followed the bed of the stream, balancing themselves on slippery stones, or treading small reefs of white sand thickly strewn with glistening mussel shells and pebbles.

Lydia made light of difficulties that would have daunted many a man. Oswald often glanced at her in wonder and was tempted, more than once, to suggest that, perhaps, they had better turn back.

They came, at last, to a spot that, he thought, must certainly baffle her. It was necessary for them to cross the stream at a point where the water rushed along, a bubbling torrent. A fallen tree offered them an insecure footway. Its trunk did not quite reach to the opposite bank, but hung over the brook, threatening to vibrate dangerously under any considerable weight. Its rounded surface, stripped of the bark and polished by rain, was, evidently, as slippery

as a huge icicle. Lydia sprang upon it without hesitation and passed over lightly with confident grace. Oswald followed, though not without misgivings, and got over safely, after several dangerous lurches. Lydia, watching him from the opposite bank with maliciously expectant eyes, had almost hoped he would slip off and tumble into the brook. It wouldn't hurt him much, and it *would* spoil the nattiness of that stylish corduroy suit. He was too "dressed up" to suit her ideas of a sportsman's proper garb. His clothes were glaringly new; they didn't look as if he had ever shot in them before. Could he shoot at all except at sitting birds? She still felt a touch of resentment towards him for killing the redbird.

They found themselves, at last, in the heart of the swamp. Its wildness and beauty repaid them for their trouble. Large fungi of many colours variegated the dark surface of the bog. Wild grapevines and other creepers interlaced themselves with many contortions about the trunks and branches of trees. Some of the trees were curiously dwarfed and misshapen, while others shot up to great heights, their stems as round and straight as the mast of a ship. The turf of the embankment here was a carpet of delicate hues of green, embroidered with wild flowers. Violets of various tints—dark purple, pale blue, pure white and several intermediate shades—grew thick in the grass. In the clear, tinkling stream, bordered by nodding ferns, tiny fishes darted hither and thither, like flashes from polished metal. All sorts of birds were fluttering about in great excitement over the unwonted invasion of their solitude. Now and then, the underbrush stirred from the scuttling away of a fox or a rabbit. Once, Lydia came face to face with a great owl perched on a low bough. It stared at her with round, unblinking eyes and a slight ruffling of its feathers, but did not stir. Squirrels frisked about on every hand.

There was the greatest abundance of game for Oswald's gun, and the setter grew restive at his master's strange inaction. But Oswald had had enough of shooting for that day after his experience with the redbird and was not at all inclined to brave Lydia's displeasure again.

A little farther on, they came to a large pond which, Lydia decided, must be the marl pit. Its appearance and surroundings were certainly of a character to justify, to some extent, its bad reputation. It was black as ink, but reflected with perfect distinctness the overhanging branches of the trees by which it was surrounded. A dense growth of water-lilies floated on its surface. The approach to it from any given point lay through a treacherous morass threaded by rivulets of the same inky water. Nowhere was a spot to be seen which seemed to afford safe footing. No wonder the pond was avoided. Only a person who had mastered the secret of crossing the bog could hope to reach its margin without serious risk of being engulfed.

As Lydia and Oswald drew near, a long-legged bird, which was slowly patrolling the edge of the pond, uttered a cry of alarm and flew away, disgusted, no doubt, at having been cheated of its intended meal.

Back of the pond, rose a slope, partly denuded of its timber. In the middle of the cleared space, stood a small hut of logs with a chimney plastered with clay. Lydia and Oswald paused for some minutes, gazing alternately at the marl pit and the cabin which seemed to them almost equally lonesome and forlorn. Presently, the creaking of wheels was heard, and shortly afterwards, there drew up before the door of the hut, a rudely fashioned cart drawn by a stunted little ox. At the side of this diminutive animal, walked or rather shuffled, the locally famous conjuror, "Uncle Manuel."

Manuel was a hunchback, frightfully deformed. His features were roughly hewn and strangely distorted. One

leg was bent in the form of a bow and his huge, bony hands had fingers, sinewy and crooked, which seemed to have been fashioned specially for gripping an enemy by the throat. His eyes, small and deep-set, were bright as diamonds, and it was asserted of him that he could subdue the most vicious animal by simply gazing at it. His usual manner was in keeping with his forbidding appearance. Except to those whom he wished to propitiate, it was surly and spiteful. Even when he had a favour to ask, he preferred his request in a sort of snarl which seemed to threaten injury if his petition were denied. No one had ever known him to bestow a genuinely friendly glance on any human being. There were some marvellous tales of his skill as a conjuror—how, for example, he had caused teacupfuls of rice to burst from the knees of his victims or lizards and frogs to leap from their mouths. Many a negro attributed the most ordinary ailments to his having conceived a grudge against him.

"Shall we pay him a visit?" asked Lydia, "you're quite sure you're not afraid?"

"He *is* rather terrifying," said Oswald, "still, if you like, we will risk it."

It was some little time before they succeeded in finding a path round the marl-pit. At their approach up the slope, the conjuror, who had seated himself in his doorway and was mopping his brow with his ragged coatsleeve, watched them with sour curiosity. He saw at a glance that they were "Quality." What could they want of him? *They* had not come for any incantation or charm. As they drew nearer, he recognised Young Miss and also Oswald who had been pointed out to him the day before in the county town as Lawyer Reeve's son. Rising briskly to his feet, he snatched off his tattered coonskin cap and bowed to the ground, his mouth writhing itself into a grin which exposed long, pointed teeth like the tusks of a boar.

" Sobbun, Miss Lydyer. Sobbun, Young Marster," he exclaimed, in a curious, half-resentful whine, which was meant to be ingratiating. " You've cum, in co'se, ter bring er leetle change ter po' ole Man'l."

Oswald laughed and tossed him a silver half-dollar.

" Taddee, Marster, taddee ! " said Manuel, obsequiously. " My, my, what er well-favoured, kind young gen'l'man ! En' leetle Mistus ! Fo' de Lawd, it warms old Man'l's heart ter see her agin' ! "

" You must tell us our fortunes, Uncle Manuel," said Lydia, " everybody says you are a wonderful conjuror, and know exactly what is going to happen."

Manuel glanced at her with a well-acted air of surprise. It was all right for the negroes to believe in his magical powers for he drove quite a trade among them as a conjuror, besides enjoying the consciousness that he was feared and could wreak his spite on any individual by merely threatening him, but he was chary of admitting to white folks that he ever attempted to exercise such arts. Only the " po' trash " were sufficiently credulous to put any faith in his spells and he always " fought shy " of the " Quality " who knew too much and were serenely indifferent to his magic. Besides, the Colonel strongly discountenanced conjuring as tending to the spread of superstition among the negroes, and more than once, had admonished him sharply. To members of the Manor family, Manuel always stoutly asserted his ignorance of even the comparatively harmless practices of fortune-telling.

" Dah now, leetle Mistus ! " he exclaimed, flinging up his hands and rolling his eyes in pretended amazement, " whar did you ebber hear sech er tale ez dat ? Somebody must er tole you jes' ter spite me. No, indeed, honey ! No, indeed ! I'ze too ole, en' got too much ter do, ter be fustyin' wid dat kind er bizness."

The cool effrontery of this assertion almost took Lydia's breath away. While still a small child—too small, in the conjuror's opinion, to "take notice"—she had, herself, heard old Manuel threaten various negroes with "spells". Besides, his sorceries were a matter of common notoriety. She grew indignant at his hardihood in denying the fact to her. Her anger was changed to amusement, however, when, as Manuel continued to proclaim his innocence, muttering, "*Me* a cunjer doctor? Did ennybody ebber? What'll dey be sayin' 'bout me nex', I wonder?" a frog leaped out suddenly from one of the pockets of his patch-work coat. With an oath, the old rascal clapped his hands on both his pockets to prevent the escape of other prizes imprisoned there. He had quite forgotten that, in passing through the woods, he had picked up several lizards, frogs and snails for use in frightening negroes with the idea that they were to be used in compounding charms. If Young Miss caught a glimpse of these, she would know he was lying. But he was already undone; she had seen the frog, and that was evidence enough for her.

Lydia's eyes danced with merriment.

"There!" she exclaimed, "you won't deny, now, that you conjure!"

Manuel looked away in surly confusion. He knew there was nothing he could say, after such an ocular demonstration of his guilt, that would have the least effect.

"Young Miss done sot her mind ter it, now," he said to himself, "en' all out doze (doors) wouldn't budge her."

"Ef you *will* have it dat I kin tell fortins, leetle Mistus," he replied, with a dogged air of submission, "I s'pose I'll ha' ter try. Shall I tell Young Marster's, dah, en' your'n tergedder?" With a knowing leer at Oswald, he exclaimed, "Pears ter me dey tied up close—yo' fortin en' his'n—in a kink monst'ous like a true luvyer's knot!" He paused, and

added, with a hoarse, wheezy chuckle, "I seems ter see a weddin' at de big house, sho'ly!"

He could not have aimed a shrewder blow. His native cunning told him Lydia would instantly resent such association with Oswald. He was not deceived by their apparent intimacy. It could be only "skin-deep." He had studied Young Miss from her infancy, and was well aware of the intensity of her social prejudices. Even if this handsome young dandy had made some impression upon her, she would be ashamed of a feeling which would lower her in her own estimation—a feeling she dare not confess to her family, her friends. Imagine a Cheston in love with a Reeve! He was not mistaken. Lydia started, and blushing hotly, gave him a wrathful glance. The impudent old wretch!

"There, that is quite enough!" she said peremptorily, and turning abruptly about, she moved hastily away.

Oswald was even more annoyed; he had been placed in a hateful position.

"Damn you!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, to Manuel, whose face wore a hypocritical look of surprise, "I've half a mind to give you a hiding!"

He hesitated whether to follow Lydia, but deciding that he could not well do otherwise, started after her with strong misgivings.

"She is angry, of course," he said to himself bitterly, "at being thought capable of such association with *me*."

Manuel watched the retreating figures with an air of malicious satisfaction.

"I knowed dat ud fetch her," he muttered, "I 'low she won't come pokin' roun' hyar agin in a hurry, a-bodderin' me."

The conjuror valued his isolation and independence highly and hated to have his lonely retreat invaded. Besides, Young Miss had enraged him by extorting the admis-

sion that he practised "cunjerin." But he had not come off from the encounter unscathed. "She'll tell Marse Bob," he mumbled ruefully, "en' he'll be down on me, like a gale er win'. De fat's in de fire, sho' nuff! I wish I knew some spell ter lay on her ter keep her quiet, but buried bottles nur a lizard's toe, nuther, wouldn't tech her. Dat kind er thing does de bizness fur niggers en' po' trash, but it don't 'pear ter work wid de quality wurf a cent!"

CHAPTER XIII

Oswald soon overtook Lydia, and they walked along for some distance in silence. Both were greatly embarrassed. Lydia felt only contempt for Manuel's pretended discovery, but it was exasperating that her desire to be kind to Oswald should have been distorted in such an odious way. What did he think? Was it possible he attached the least significance to Manuel's imputation? She would loathe him if he were capable of harbouring the idea that her friendliness was due to any other feeling than her sense of obligation and a touch of sympathy. Was old Reeve's son, to whom she had condescended, not without an effort, so conceited as to imagine he had any special attraction for her?

Glancing covertly at him now and then, she soon absolved him. His bearing was anything but confident. She could see that he shared her confusion. No doubt, the conjuror's words had seemed to him merely coarse and impertinent; the situation was awkward for him as well as for herself. Well—they could not go on like this; one of them must break the ice.

"We shall be out of the swamp in a little while, now," she said, carelessly. "I'm afraid you find it tiresome."

"Not at all," answered Oswald, quickly. Her manner reassured him. Whatever she felt, it was evident she cherished no active animosity. It was plucky of her to face him so promptly, with such a cool, indifferent air. Most girls would have hung back timidly, waiting for him to speak, or else would have rashly sought to cover their self-consciousness with a nervous volubility.

They were soon in easy conversation again, and the talk

drifted to Oswald's experiences abroad. He described his impressions of different countries, especially England, in a light, pleasant vein. Lydia at once grew interested. She had heard a great deal of England from Miss Twiggs, and was curious about the life of the English squires, because of its resemblance to that of their Tidewater congeners. Oswald had stayed at country houses and was easily able to paint picture after picture for her with free, careless touch. He was clever enough to keep his own personality in the background, and yet insensibly, she was made to perceive that no social barriers had been raised against him; that wherever he had gone, he had been received on an equal footing. The fact seemed to her to give him an additional claim upon her. In spite of her prejudices, she could not help recognising the injustice of visiting the social sins of his father upon him. He was cultivated, polished, a gentleman in speech and manner. What a surprise for her father, who had always asserted so confidently that Reeve's son would return a pretentious cad!

As they neared the house, the first person they encountered was Basil on his way to look for Lydia. Her prolonged absence had caused him to fear that some accident might have happened. At sight of Oswald, his heart gave a sudden throb. Was Oswald to be the rival he had dreaded? Notwithstanding his social disadvantages, he might prove formidable. To Basil, even at college, he had seemed to possess a magnetism that attracted both men and women. Basil himself had been affected by it, and now, it seemed to him it had taken a new, more dangerous form. Oswald was no longer merely a handsome boy, but a finished man of the world. It was necessary only to glance at him, as he and Lydia came swiftly across the lawn, conversing with great animation, to note the signs, invisible to any but jealous eyes, of a tender interest in his companion. Evidently, it rested

with Lydia alone as to whether this interest should be permitted ultimately to declare itself. Was it likely she would remain insensible to a personality which must appeal to all the slumbering woman in her? Her pride was great, but love, he was now ready to believe, might prove the stronger. There could be no doubt of one thing; *he* must suffer from the comparison which Lydia had doubtless already begun to make between him and Oswald. How could it be otherwise? Oswald was a woman's man and he was not. Oswald was good-looking, tactful, fluent; he was homely, ungainly, painfully self-conscious. Precisely where he was sure to blunder, Oswald would be at his best.

They had so much in common—these two. Was it not evident? Who would not have remarked, at once, that they were younger, brighter, fresher in sympathies and feeling than he? He felt, as he watched them, that a gulf had opened between Lydia and himself. In a twinkling, Lydia and Oswald had created a sphere of their own from which he was excluded. It was all so natural, so logical—a thing that was bound to be when they once came together. They might have been fashioned for each other. Oswald, to Basil's eye, was worthy of her. At college, Basil had fancied the noble-looking boy to be imaginative, sensitive, with pure ideals and proud ambitions. Perhaps, at that time, his outward appearance had been really an index to a certain delicacy of feeling. But Basil, ignorant of his manner of life since he had known him, had no suspicion that his development had taken a direction precisely the contrary of that to which his boyish inclinations, as he interpreted them, had seemed to tend. He still attributed to him the same wholesome impulses, the same fastidiousness of thought and feeling. How was he to know that this fastidiousness was purely physical? That Oswald's refinement was that of a voluptuary to whom only that is immoral which is coarse and gross? In his blindness,

Basil imagined him to be in close sympathy with Lydia at every point. He suffered keenly, at the thought of the idyl of happiness which, perhaps, had already begun for them.

Lydia greeted Basil laughingly.

"We have had quite an adventure—Mr. Reeve and I—" she exclaimed, "I caught him trespassing in the deer park and brought him home to face Papa."

Basil wondered what would be the outcome of the interview. To all appearances, Oswald was not at all concerned. Perhaps he had reason to believe that Lydia's influence would be exerted strongly in his favour.

"Excuse me a moment," said Lydia, when they reached the verandah, "I must find Papa."

Through an open door as she entered the hall, she spied her father at the sideboard in the dining-room compounding a toddy. This was a work of great nicety and deliberation requiring accurate measurements and careful manipulation, but Lydia burst in impetuously upon the Colonel and flung her arms about him just as he was dipping out an even teaspoonful of crushed sugar from a bowl.

"Ah, Papa!" she exclaimed, "what do you think?"

"I think," said the Colonel, glancing in simulated wrath at the empty teaspoon and the particles of sugar scattered over the sideboard, "I think you might have been a little more careful, seeing what I was about."

"Oh, you won't mind when you hear what I have to tell you! A toddy's nothing to losing me!"

"Losing you!" exclaimed the Colonel, looking round at her in surprise, "why, what do you mean?"

Lydia, in the delight of being once more at home, had forgotten all about the incident on the steamer until reminded of it by meeting Oswald. She now hastily described her adventure with the bull and Oswald's timely rescue.

The Colonel, at the close of her story, clasped her in his arms with a shudder. "Thank God, I have you safe!" he cried. "I must find the young man at once, and thank him."

"You won't have far to go," said Lydia, laughing, "he is out on the verandah with Basil. I happened to meet him in the woods and brought him home with me."

"Who is he?"

Lydia hesitated, knowing how strong were her father's prejudices.

"His name is Reeve—Oswald Reeve," she said, with a touch of confusion.

"Oswald Reeve!" exclaimed the Colonel, disconcerted. "That's our Reeve's son."

"Yes, Papa," said Lydia quickly, "but, of course, you won't let him see you think of that. Remember, he saved me from a dreadful danger. Besides, he is a gentleman—at least I think so."

"And Reeve's son?" said the Colonel dubiously, "how can he be a gentleman? But I must thank him; I owe him a heavy debt, my darling."

The Colonel went out upon the verandah with strong misgivings. He expected to find in Oswald a revised and corrected edition of his father. His advantages of education and of travel had doubtless imparted a certain veneer. But scratch this coat of polish ever so lightly, and very probably, you would find the same vulgar traits and coarse inclinations that were so unpleasantly apparent in his father. It was one of the Colonel's favorite dogmas that there could be no true gentility without good blood. It was his firm conviction that at least four generations were required to make a gentleman. There was a kind of refinement—a mere surface refinement of speech and manner—that might be acquired in a very few years; but a refinement that would stand

the usual tests of his class—the refinement, in other words, that was instinctive and never at fault was, in his opinion, the exclusive attribute of the "born" gentleman or lady.

To his great surprise, it was precisely this sort of refinement that Oswald exhibited not only in his bearing but in chance, unconscious indications which showed that it was habitual to him. The Colonel watched him narrowly, noting every point, though his manner gave no indication of his scrutiny. Oswald, indeed, was quite insensible of his observation. The Colonel's manner was so pleasantly friendly, so free and natural, that almost immediately, he felt perfectly at ease. What a contrast there was between his host's attitude now and his bearing towards him when, years ago as a child, he had paid a visit to the Manor with his father! Then, also, the Colonel had meant to be kind, but his kindness had been patronising. Now, there was no trace of condescension. Lydia's assurance on the steamer was being fully justified. None the less, the Colonel continued to be puzzled to account for Oswald's good breeding.

"Where the devil does he get it from?" he asked himself again. "Ah, I have it!" he said at last, with a feeling of relief in the discovery that his pet notion had not been discredited. "His mother was a Frisby—no better people in the county. He inherits it from her, of course."

What a pity he was Reeve's son! But for that, he might have had a bright future before him. Well, why not strain a point in his favour? Did he not owe him something? He was all right on his mother's side, and as for Reeve, there was no occasion for recognising him. "Gad, I'll do it!" said the Colonel resolutely, feeling that he was making a genuine sacrifice of his prejudices. "The poor fellow will have a hard time of it here unless some one of us takes him by the hand. Yes, I'll stand by him. No doubt, with his sympathies and tastes, he will value my support as the

greatest service I could render him. I fancy he will do me credit."

When Oswald rose to go, the Colonel shook hands heartily with him and assured him he would always be glad to see him at the Manor.

"Well, Papa," demanded Lydia saucily, when Oswald had departed, "what do you think of him? Was I wrong in saying he was a gentleman?"

"No, of course not," answered the Colonel promptly. "It seemed incredible to me when I thought of Reeve, but I had forgotten his mother was a Frisby. Blood always tells."

"The good blood, yes, Papa," said Lydia, with a sly glance of mischief, "but how about the bad? It seems to me there is something wrong with your theory after all. You're fond of saying, 'It's a poor rule that won't work both ways.'"

"Well, the good blood has got the upper hand in this case," retorted the Colonel, laughing, "at least, I am going to act on that assumption. I've made up my mind to introduce him to our friends."

"That is very nice of you," said Lydia warmly, "it's the way I would have chosen to pay my debt to him."

The Colonel looked at her thoughtfully for a moment. Was he doubtful of the advisability of permitting further association between her and this handsome young fellow who was the grandson of his father's overseer? Pooh! His girl's pride of class was as strong as his own. He could trust her to keep young Reeve at his proper distance. Besides, she was fond of Basil Kent. That was a talisman to keep her from harm. There could be no shadow of doubt, to the Colonel's mind, as to her choice between these two.

CHAPTER XIV

Oswald was greatly elated when he left the Manor. The Colonel's invitation had set the coveted hall-mark upon him. He had little or nothing to fear, henceforth, from the social prejudices which had seemed so threatening. No one would dream of slighting him after it had become known that he was accepted at the Manor. The Colonel's endorsement of him socially differentiated him from his father with an emphasis which was not to be mistaken.

His gratification was all the keener because his surroundings at home had proved, upon actual trial, to be even more discouraging than he had feared. The new house, just completed, which his father exhibited with proud complacency, was hopelessly vulgar. Reeve called it his " mansion " —a name which was justified, to some extent, by its size. It was a great, flaring structure of red brick, with numerous balconies, bay windows and other protuberances painted white, and a gingerbread cupola on the mansard roof. Placed in a conspicuous position in the middle of an open lawn on the principal street of the county town, it seemed to Oswald, among the quaint, unambitious buildings of the sleepy little village, like a loudly dressed snob in a company of gentlemen of severely sober garb and demeanour. Its bad taste was the more offensive because, but for it, the town would have been almost a perfect bit out of the old colonial past. The buildings, with but few exceptions, dated from the middle or the latter part of the eighteenth century, and some of them were even older. There had been scarcely any change at all since the outbreak of the Revolution had

arrested growth. There were houses in process of erection then that had never been completed.

Prior to the Revolution, the town had been a port of entry for vessels engaged in the tobacco trade with England and had enjoyed a really flourishing commerce. It was the point of distribution and supply for plantations for many miles around. The Revolution destroyed its foreign trade, and in a few years, the town, which had fancied itself on the road to becoming a city, sank suddenly to the level of a stagnating village. The respectable mercantile class, with large warehouses and spacious dwellings, dwindled to a few torpid shopkeepers, and many of the buildings lacked occupants and were converted gradually to pettier uses. In course of time, in the absence of any growth, the town came to have a finished look, and in contrast with more bustling communities, took on an air of antiquity and quaintness, of almost dreamy indolence and indifference to what was happening elsewhere. The stranger could not fail to be impressed by the unusual size and solidity of most of the buildings—square, roomy structures of rough-surfaced brick with very thick walls, arched doorways and porches, and windows with deep embrasures and small panes set in heavy frames. Most of them were surrounded by gardens enclosed by high brick walls and either terraced or sloping to the river. These gardens were mazes of shrubbery and flowers with here and there a fine old tree. The grassy streets made curious turns and windings, bringing one suddenly upon the oddest nooks and corners, and everywhere there was the same drowsy quiet and repose.

The people were thoroughly in harmony with the influences of the place. They had long since outgrown ambition and had no desire for change. Even the shopkeepers took their ease. The competition among them was almost perfunctory. Few of them exerted themselves to attract

trade or humour a purchaser. The tedium of business routine and of long confinement indoors was lightened by a great variety of expedients. The salesmen dawdled over every bargain for the pleasure of conversation with their customers and frequently enlivened the slow afternoons with a game of cards. In pleasant weather, the shopkeepers spent the greater part of the time gossiping on the courthouse green.

It might be imagined that a restless, pushing individual like Lawyer Reeve would have been a disturbing factor in so leisure-loving a community; that his tireless energy would have proved a distinctly irritating element. It was just the reverse. The townspeople, after all, had a latent spirit of emulation. They liked to fancy they could have been enterprising and progressive had they cared to make the effort. In their eyes, Reeve was the actual embodiment of their imagined capabilities. He was a kind of human document testifying unmistakably to the fact that there was potentiality among them. They were proud of him as their one modern man. They esteemed him the more because he saved them, one and all, the least necessity of effort on their own part to prove the truth of their theory. It was so convenient to shift things to his shoulders. He was far from shrinking from the burden and was proud of the fact that he carried it all alone and had, thus far, proved himself equal to any emergency. It was his special boast that, but for him, the town would have stagnated utterly. "It takes *me* to wake 'em up!" he often declared with swelling importance.

Upon his return from the Manor, Oswald found his father seated on the front verandah. Reeve was arrayed in his eternal suit of black broadcloth which made him look uncomfortably stiff and warm. He was a bulky man, with a round red face, a shock of coarse, iron gray hair, and small, twinkling blue eyes with usually a gleam in them which, at first, gave

one the impression of an expansive and kindly nature. His mouth, coarsely cut, expressed rough jollity and good fellowship, and altogether, he would have been taken for a cheery, generous old man of probably convivial tastes and a rough sort of humour. Such, indeed, he sought to pass for, and usually, he succeeded. But those who knew him well had been taught by bitter experience that his apparent joviality was merely a mask for hardness and cunning.

His eyes kindled at sight of his son and he cried out with genuine heartiness,

"Well, what luck, my lad?"

Oswald flung his empty gamebag—he had thrown away the redbird before leaving the Manor—upon the back of a chair and said,

"That depends upon what you call luck. I got no game. But I had a pleasant visit at the Manor."

"At the Manor!" exclaimed his father in great surprise, half rising from his chair. "What took you there?"

"I had the good fortune to render a slight service to Colonel Cheston's daughter on the steamer. We happened to meet to-day in the woods and she insisted on my accompanying her home to be thanked by her father."

"And the Colonel received you?"

"Yes, he received me; he was really very kind."

"You mean he treated you like—like a gentleman?" gasped Reeve, scarce able to credit his ears.

"Like a gentleman!" said Oswald, sharply. "How should he treat me? I *am* a gentleman, I hope."

"Of course, of course," assented his father, hurriedly. "But I didn't think he'd do it all at once. You must have made a great impression. And the service you rendered his daughter—that was a lucky stroke! I'd rather she took a fancy to you than the Colonel, even; whatever she wishes is the law for him, and I've a reason for wanting

you to stand well with her. You've got a fine start, my boy —a devilish fine start!"

The lawyer chuckled, and rubbing his hands together, as he always did when pleased, glanced sideways at Oswald approvingly, but with a certain timidity, as if not quite sure that he might not have offended him again.

"You like her?" he continued, more boldly, as Oswald made no sign of dissent. "She would suit you for a wife?"

Oswald stared at him. What did he mean? Surely, he was not foolish enough to imagine that he could think seriously of Lydia Cheston in that light. True, she did not seem so inaccessible since his visit to the Manor: both she and her father had been gracious, but—his wife!

"It is not a question of what would suit me," he answered, coldly, "why suggest the impossible?"

"It is not impossible," said his father, quickly; "it isn't easy, I admit, but—I have a plan. What would you say to being one day not only her husband, but the master of the Manor? In fact, the two things hang together."

Oswald fancied his father's brain was addled by vain imaginings.

"I don't understand," he said, impatiently. "The Colonel has a son; of course, he will inherit the property. It is the rule, I believe, with these Tidewater families."

"Yes, it is the rule," admitted Reeve, "but he can't inherit. The Colonel doesn't really own the Manor; it is mortgaged so heavily that, at his death, it would have to be sold. Turlo has only a small farm that the Colonel set aside for him years ago."

"How would that benefit me," objected Oswald, "even if I were fortunate enough to find favour with Miss Lydia?"

"I hold the mortgages," said Reeve, with a click of his strong white teeth like the sudden snapping of a trap, "a little while longer and I shall be able to foreclose if necessary.

Of course, I would choose a favourable opportunity and buy in the whole estate. It wouldn't come to that, though, if they accepted you. I would even be willing to put up more money for the Colonel, if I knew you were coming into the Manor after awhile. He'd only have to say the word and I'd stop the leaks and set him on his feet again. God bless you, I'd take the best care of him; for our purposes, his good-will would have to go with the property."

"You actually think of buying *him!*" exclaimed Oswald, astonished at his audacity.

"Does that surprise you? I have been saving money for years with that very object in view. Ever since you were a mere boy, I have dreamed of this marriage."

Oswald glanced at his father with new interest. It was a strange idea that he had conceived, and yet, it was logical enough, after all. No one would have suspected a man of his mould of cherishing such a project which had in it an element of imagination; he was nothing if not practical. But Oswald could readily perceive the underlying motive. It was a kind of vengeance he meant to take for his social suppression, and at the same time, a means of establishing his son firmly in a commanding position. Oswald fancied there was also a curious sort of pride for him, in feeling that he might be able to pose as the regenerator of the Cheston fortunes. He had often heard his father, even when inveighing against the Chestons for their treatment of him, let fall chance expressions about "the family," which indicated a covert admiration and envy not unmixed with a certain sense of proprietorship in its dignity, merely because he had been born on the estate. Perhaps it was, in part, hereditary instinct derived from several generations of Manor overseers who had served the Chestons with habitual fidelity.

"But you can't be in earnest," he said, still incredulous.

"The Manor is a great estate. The Colonel seems to live simply. How could he get so deep into debt?"

"Nothing easier for him and many another of his class," said Reeve carelessly. "It's the old story—incompetence, extravagance, endorsing paper for any friend who asks him. Besides, the Colonel wasn't meant to be a farmer. He was educated for the army and took the Manor only because his elder brother, Edgar, was disinherited by the Judge, who had discovered that he was a gambler, a spendthrift, and something worse. The Colonel was then a dashing officer and might have risen to high rank. At the Manor, he has merely vegetated, letting things drift. A great place like that, mismanaged, eats up money, especially when it has to support a small army of slaves. He has been borrowing from me for years, and he also owes his brother some twenty thousand dollars."

"What became of the brother?"

"He disappeared immediately after his father's death, carrying off with him a beautiful girl, the daughter of the rector of old Winton, Mr. Magruder. He thought she would inherit a large fortune from her grandfather, but the old man, at first, cut her off to keep the money from Edgar Cheston whom he hated. He afterwards relented, but Edgar did not know this, and his wife died in poverty somewhere out west. Edgar had been left some property by his father, but he imagined it would hardly suffice to satisfy his creditors. As it happened, a surplus remained and the Colonel held it for years in trust, until at last, Edgar was declared by the courts to be legally dead, as he had not been heard from. Then the Colonel borrowed the money with the consent of the other heirs, his mother and sisters. He is absurdly proud in money matters and would insist on repaying it if Edgar ever reappeared."

"There is no danger of that, I presume."

"On the contrary, there is imminent danger. Edgar Cheston is still living. I met him a week or two ago, by mere accident, in New York. He is hot against his brother. If he takes a hand, the Colonel's ruin will be hastened—provided I fail to come to his rescue. You perceive the situation—do you not? His future depends upon me. I can either keep him at the Manor or drive him out. When he realises this, I don't think he would hold out against you, if you could make the running with his daughter."

Oswald was suddenly conscious of a strong temptation. His father's view of the situation was grossly sordid, but plausible. He doubted if there were any consideration that would induce the Colonel to accept him as the husband of his daughter, but the fear of losing the Manor might bend his pride. If he could win the love of that fascinating creature, the way might be smoothed. His father, with his keen, hard sense, his firm grip of facts, had suddenly made the thing practicable. He did not yet love the girl, but he had found her charming; it were easy, with but a gleam of hope, to yield himself wholly to the intoxication of her beauty. There was another obstacle, however. He had seen at once that Basil Kent cared for her. He ought not to enter the lists against Basil; he owed him too much for all he had done at college. It would be basely ungrateful to attempt to snatch his possible happiness from him. His carefully cultivated instinct of gentility revolted at the thought.

"You have omitted one factor from your calculations," he said to his father.

"What is that?" asked Reeve, with a look of surprise.

"The relation between Miss Cheston and Basil Kent. They seem very fond of each other."

"Yes, as friends. I don't believe she ever thought of him as a lover—he's too serious for her—but if she has any such idea in her head, I can kill him off with a word or two."

Again, Oswald looked doubtful.

"I shall begin to think you are a magician," he said.

"There is no magic about it. The Colonel is an ardent Secessionist. So is his daughter. In their eyes, one of their own class who differs from them is a renegade, a traitor. I happen to know that Basil is, at heart, an Abolitionist; I have probed him without his suspecting it. I have only to expose his real opinions to make him obnoxious at the Manor."

"If Miss Cheston really cared for him, that wouldn't matter."

"You don't know the Tidewater women; they are bitter partisans. Besides, the Colonel's daughter is a little prude—for all her wildness. She would suffer torture rather than yield to what she would consider an unworthy attachment. Basil would disgrace himself far more effectually with her in that way than in almost any other. It seems absurd, but it's a fact, nevertheless. It's only another form of the cursed pride with which these people are eaten up."

"But Basil is my friend," said Oswald, impulsively. He was angry with himself for having listened to his father. "What you propose would be a kind of treachery to him. I am deeply indebted to Basil. At college, he took me by the hand and helped me to form associations which have been of great benefit to me. He could not have been kinder had he been my brother. Shall I repay him by attempting to rob him?"

The crafty lawyer gave his son a scrutinising glance. Although Oswald spoke with so much heat, Reeve doubted his sincerity. "He would like to do what he denounces," was his conclusion. Nevertheless, he admired him for his outburst. He was pleased to hear *his* son utter such high-flown sentiments. Were they not what might have been expected of him? He was a gentleman, and a gentleman

must cherish, or seem to cherish, superlative ideas of honour and all that sort of thing. "It is my money that has done this," said Reeve to himself, with the feeling that he was obtaining a handsome return for his outlay. "But I scarcely thought it would have made him so damned particular!"

"Leave Basil to me," he said, reassuringly. "All you need do is to make yourself agreeable to Miss Lydia. There is no harm in that. Suppose she should prefer you to him? I don't see that you are called upon to sacrifice her happiness as well as your own for his sake. If she married him, he would tire her to death. She's all life and gaiety, with a spice of the devil in her, and he was cut out for a preacher. She couldn't stand him a week!"

Oswald made no reply, and Reeve took his silence for consent. The truth was, Oswald found himself in a dilemma. His social ambition, as well as his keen interest in Lydia, inclined him strongly to the programme his father had outlined. His sense of what was "gentlemanly" laid bare to him the ugliness of the scheme. He wavered, irresolute, feeling that very little were needed to make him yield. Was his father right, after all, in his theories about "pushing" him? Would his activity which he had dreaded prove to be advantageous rather than harmful? Social consequence, power, perhaps even happiness actually seemed to lie that way. But the issue was one of honourable conduct, of nicety of feeling—in a word, of the gentility he had believed himself to possess. He wished to do the other thing—the thing that was low and unworthy; he could not hide from himself the detestable fact. Was his refinement, after all, merely artificial? He felt keen shame at the thought. None the less, he could not bring himself to the point of saying "no." He would leave the matter open; perhaps the contingencies his father had indicated might not arise. He would continue to be a gentleman—if he could.

CHAPTER XV

Reeve's interview with Edgar Cheston in New York had not been wholly satisfactory to the latter. There were gaps in the lawyer's statement of affairs at the Manor—due to his habitual caution and the fear that inconvenient questions might be asked if he said too much—which Edgar thought it desirable to fill in for himself. He accordingly set a private inquiry on foot with the view to determining whether it would be worth while to return to the Manor. He would have preferred not to return. He had left home an embittered man, anxious to cut loose from associations which had become repugnant to him, and resolved never to go back unless he could do so with flying colours. As yet, he had not obtained the means of gratifying this ambition.

He had seen no reason until now for concerning himself about what was happening at home. His debts, he was sure, had swallowed up all the property his father had left him; he had the less occasion to seek information on this point because of a lively impression that they amounted to a good deal more. His wife's prospects, bright at first, had been suddenly dissipated by the change in her grandfather's will. Until he met Reeve, he had remained in ignorance of a second change bequeathing her a fortune. As to the family, he was indifferent. Even his mother's affection for him, which had been greater than for any of her other children, laid no claim upon him. He had always been selfish and exacting, and he even cherished a grudge against her for not having used her influence with his father in his behalf with better effect. He had written to no one at home but his brother's wife, and to her only twice, years ago. Since

then, he had preserved an unbroken silence. Fortune had not favoured him in the way he had hoped. A rolling stone until quite recently, he had but just begun to gather moss. Money alone would enable him to rehabilitate himself, and he was still obstinately bent upon not "turning up" at home unless with ample resources at his command.

He had travelled over the entire continent in pursuit of wealth, with now and then a glimmer of success, but for the most part, in a chronic state of impecuniosity. He was a born gambler, and luck had, upon the whole, been against him. The only real attachment he had ever known had been for the beautiful girl whom he had beguiled into sharing his flight, with the fear of imprisonment for forgery haunting him at every step of his journey towards western wilds, and she had died within a year after their marriage. He might have learned to care for the daughter she had left him, but death robbed him of her, also, when she was still an infant. After that, he grew hardened and reckless until at last he became a finished scamp, a professional adventurer, all the more dangerous because he preserved the external forms of good breeding which accentuated certain natural gifts. As a young man, he had been very handsome, and time, apparently, had made but little impression upon him. His voice, soft and low, was insinuating, and his manner, especially towards women, was almost caressing. He had always been insensible to fear, and his bold black eyes looked danger insolently in the face. He never boasted and seldom threatened, but the most daring felt instinctively he was their superior in courage, and in any company of desperadoes, he was sure to be hailed, when he became known, as their natural leader. His personal charm and force were, in fact, extraordinary; had they been exerted systematically, he might have achieved his object, for his mind was acute and even brilliant, his energy indomitable.

But he had one fatal drawback—an inherent moral obliquity which always inclined him to crooked courses—and this, together with his mania for gambling, had wrecked him again and again on the very verge of success. He would lie to his best friend if it suited the whim of the moment or some immediate purpose; even his fellow-rogues found they could not trust him. He had no faith in anything, and looked upon the world as a card table at which every man and every woman was playing a hand with the object of cheating whenever the chance offered. It was a battle of the strongest, the most cunning. His only theory of life was to make the most profitable use of his advantages, to fleece people remorselessly when he could. His victims sometimes turned on him, and more than once, he was brought to bay or forced to flee, leaving behind him a trail of curses and a blackened name. But the name mattered nothing. For years, his real name had been buried in oblivion, and he could not begin to remember his many aliases. When Reeve met him, he was figuring as Mr. Darcy Montague, agent for a burlesque actress, Miss Ethel Vane, who happened, just then, to be a reigning star at one of the principal theatres in New York. She was a beautiful young woman as well as a clever actress and drew large houses every night.

Luck seemed to have turned, at last, in his favour. He had "discovered" Miss Vane, and was sharing her sudden prosperity. His share was even greater than his associates supposed. The actress was completely under his control and took only what he chose to give her. Besides her earnings, he was reaping a rich harvest at cards and at billiards from wealthy men about town who were willing to lose to him in return for his influence with the charming girl. There was a perfect understanding between him and them, none the less binding because it was tacit. Wherever the actress ap-

peared, men hastened to pay court to her. Few were rash enough to seek an introduction without the means of bestowing costly attentions. They took it for granted that her interest in them must be fanned by presents, pleasure jaunts and dainty suppers. The man who aspires to the favour of an actress of Miss Vane's type, unless he happen to be a celebrity or exceptionally clever, knows in advance that the amusement will be expensive. The great majority of those who swelled Miss Vane's train had no other claim to recognition than the wealth which enabled them to vie with each other in giving her pleasure.

Upon these, Edgar Cheston did not scruple to levy toll. It was a form of plunder that seemed to him to be almost legitimate by comparison with some of the schemes of robbery to which he had been reduced. It was the more acceptable because he was compelled to give but little in return—an introduction to Miss Vane, an occasional supper, graced by the actress's presence, a chat with her in the green room, now and then. These were favours which she had come to regard as part of the business of her calling, but to most of the recipients, they held out promises of a closer intimacy that, as yet, had not been realised, for the reason that Edgar Cheston had no intention of sharing his influence over her with any one else. The moths fluttered industriously around the candle and merely succeeded in singeing their wings. She was his money-maker, his decoy, and he guarded her vigilantly from any entanglements that might endanger his exclusive proprietorship.

One evening, about a week after his meeting with Reeve, Edgar entered the theatre at which Miss Vane was playing. He had just received an answer to his inquiry about affairs at home, and the news had opened up a vista of unimagined possibilities. His active brain deduced from them, with great rapidity, a definite scheme which appealed most strongly

to his ambition, his cupidity, his long treasured rancour against his brother for having usurped his place as master of the Manor. His chance had come at last. The Manor might yet be his. It was in his power to make himself rich, not by saving and protracted scheming, but at a single stroke, and to return to Maryland metamorphosed into a respectable character, a capitalist, a successful man. The charge of forgery which had compelled his sudden flight, had been "settled" shortly afterwards, through the agency of Reeve, and the memory of his other misdeeds, no doubt, had long since faded. All he needed was the aid of a clever young woman, and none could have been better suited to his purposes than the actress whom he had, unconsciously, trained for the very rôle he wished her to play.

The curtain had just risen when he reached the theatre and seated himself in the box that was always reserved for him. He was in evening dress, and as usual, carefully "got up." No one would have guessed his real age. Of superb physique, he was still, in spite of hardships and excesses, an alert and vigorous-looking man. Only his valet knew that his close-cut black hair owed its color to skilful dyeing, and that many a crease and wrinkle were hidden by cosmetics. Apparently, he was a fresh, healthy man of not more than forty years. His real age was considerably over fifty.

It was not vanity alone—and he valued his personal appearance very highly, because it had, almost invariably, commended him strongly to women—that made him wish to look much younger than he was. His make-up was really a disguise. He still retained a remnant of regard for his family name, his identity as a Cheston, and had always looked to the possibility of resuming his social position. None of his present acquaintances knew him as he was, with hair prematurely whitened, the broken down, disreputable outcast from the Manor. To them, he was only the well-bred, jovial

bon vivant, Darcy Montague. He had but to discard the latter's name, his dyes and his pomades, to sink his fictitious personality and become Edgar Cheston once more with but little risk of discovery. He congratulated himself, now, on his prudence. His counterfeit double could scarcely fail to be of the greatest advantage to him in the prosecution of his fraud. By changing suddenly from make-believe to reality, from a comparatively youthful man to one past middle age, he would be able to carry Ethel off to Maryland with impunity and baffle any inquiry that might be set on foot. He had deceived her, also, as to his age, and had strong reasons for wishing to keep up the fiction with her, but there was no choice. He must let her into his secret, if he was to succeed, and he was ready to make any sacrifice for the end he had in view.

It seemed to Edgar, as he watched her from his box, that Ethel Vane had never been so fascinating as to-night, the last, he hoped, of her appearance on the stage. The piece was a musical travesty, written for her and cleverly contrived to show her special gifts to the best advantage. She was a versatile mimic, with a demure naturalness which gave to all her impersonations—especially those that had a spice of mischief in them—a piquant charm. But it was her beauty, her grace, her wonderful freshness and spontaneity that chiefly captivated the house. Her mere presence on the stage gave life and colour to the scene, the action, the words, however tame. To-night, she was radiant; she carried her audience with her—the women as well as the men—in delighted suspense, awaiting some new trick or turn of expression more subtle than any of the vivid yet delicate touches with which she had practically re-created her part.

Edgar studied her with a new pride of possession, a keener zest than he had ever felt before in her success, even when she had won such an unequivocal triumph at her début.

It was he who had first recognised her powers, who had educated and trained her carefully for this work. But for him, she might have remained unknown, or at any rate, obscure. His thoughts travelled back exultantly to the day when, a child of twelve or thirteen, she had been committed to his care by her father, an English actor, who had been a fellow-adventurer in the west.

The two men had been attracted to each other by mutual recognition of their social superiority to those about them and the similarity of their fortunes and their traits. Like Edgar, Dick Milbank had once been a gentleman. Like him, also, he was a gambler, a spendthrift, a debauchee. He, too, had left his home under a cloud, and meant never to return unless he could make a fortune. A confiding woman had accompanied him, and she was dead. The two compared notes, and agreed that life, thus far, had been equally hard on them and much in the same way. They were in perfect accord in the determination to indemnify themselves as best they could, without regard to the means. It was not long before they formed a kind of partnership in preying upon their fellows. Their joint ventures were sufficiently profitable to bind them more closely together. Neither trusted the other fully, but each felt a greater degree of confidence in his comrade than in anyone else.

Hence it happened that Milbank, stricken with an illness which he knew to be fatal, placed his daughter in Edgar's charge. "Her mother is dead," he explained, "it is a long way to England, and there is no money in my family or my wife's. What there was, I spent long ago. I have a few thousands in bank. Take them and educate Ethel to be a governess or something else a lady may be. I *must* trust her to you, Edgar; there is no one else. Promise me you'll be square about this. Both of us are gentlemen—or were gentlemen, once. You won't go back on me?"

Edgar promised readily enough. It would be very convenient to have a "few thousands" to handle for Ethel's education or for other purposes, as events and his necessities might decide. As it happened, he fulfilled his trust to the extent of spending most of the money on Ethel. As the child grew to girlhood, she developed a beauty and charm which, Edgar perceived, might be made to yield a handsome profit on the investment. He educated her with the greatest care, with the deliberate intention of fashioning her for his own selfish purposes. She was given the best masters in languages, in music, in painting. Edgar himself taught her to ride, to dance, to fence, and drilled her inexorably in all matters of etiquette and deportment. She became a finished gentlewoman in manner, with the special air of distinction at which he aimed. If he ever had the chance, he meant she should fly at high game.

The girl gradually fell under the domination of the charm which he was always able to exert when he chose. She did not love him, but she was fascinated by him. She yielded submissively to what seemed to her to be an imperious force. He was her protector, her guardian, her task-master who must be obeyed, whether she wished or not, and there was a judicious mixture of indulgence with tyranny which made her often fancy she was happy. Accustomed to a wandering, hap-hazard life with her father, without the companionship of women, she found nothing strange in the fact that Edgar permitted no intimacies with others of her sex, and she was conscious of no special loss in her isolation. Thus, she grew up contented in the atmosphere which Edgar had purposely created for her, and knew but few ideas except such as she imbibed from him. She had read a good deal and was well informed, but all her opinions of life, of religion, of morals, had filtered through the medium of his cynical intelligence, and she accepted his judgments as con-

clusive from the mere force of habit. He had made of her a lovely young heathen who shrank from nothing he deemed it convenient to propose.

Edgar felt an arrogant confidence in his mastery, which he believed to be complete, of her most secret impulses. She was an instrument on which he could play almost any imaginable tune. And these people before him in the pit fancied she was theirs, in a certain sense; that she depended on their favour, their applause. A word from him, and she would vanish forever from their gaze. He was about to speak this word. Glancing down at them ironically, he muttered beneath his breath, "Gaze your fill, my friends; you'll never have another chance."

After the performance, Edgar accompanied the actress home. She had apartments in a quiet neighbourhood not far from the theatre. These, she had fitted up luxuriously, to suit her own ideas of taste and comfort, creating an atmosphere of elegance which impressed the most sceptical of her visitors with the feeling that she was really as fastidious and refined as she seemed to be. Besides the parlour, dining-room and bedroom, there was a small library stocked with standard works which gave evidence of use. The leading magazines and reviews of the day lay scattered on a centre table. The walls of this room and also of the parlour were embellished with paintings by French artists, now famous, but then, almost unknown. Among them were several exquisite water colours by hapless Leon Bonvin. In one corner of the parlour, a piano stood open, with one of Schubert's songs upon the rack. Miss Vane had the gift of music; her voice, a mezzo soprano, was one of unusual richness and power.

It was into this room she ushered Edgar, and excusing herself, withdrew to remove her wraps. She took it for granted he would stay for supper. It was his habit to do so

almost every night. She was absent but a few minutes, and when she returned, the door of the adjoining room was thrown open by a sedate-looking waiter with the announcement that supper was served. At a nod from Edgar, the man withdrew, leaving them alone at table. He was used to these intimations; it was only when the actress had other visitors that he was permitted to remain. As soon as he was safely out of earshot, Edgar exclaimed,

"I have news for you, my girl!"

"Some rich haul?" asked Ethel, with a laugh and a shrug of her finely rounded shoulders. She imagined he had had a great stroke at cards. It was always a matter of self-congratulation for her when he succeeded in "plucking" some rich fool. She felt, then, that she had played the game well, and it amused her to learn which one of her admirers had suffered at his hands, and to gauge the extent of his infatuation for her by the amount he consented to lose. She was never moved to pity for their victims. Pity! It would be wasted upon them. One and all, they were selfish speculators for her favour. None of them, she saw clearly enough, regarded her as aught but a beautiful toy to be played with and broken and flung away when they tired of it. She had seen the thing done over and over again with other women, and shivered, at times, at the thought that it might ultimately be her fate. There was not a man among them who valued her except for her beauty, her transient charm. All of them looked upon her with greedy, calculating eyes, appraising her as they might have appraised any rare animal. Some were fawning, some confident, some insolent, even, but without exception, they seemed to assume that she could be bought; for them, it was but a question of money and of time. It was clearly her right to amuse herself at their expense, to make them fetch and carry, to guide them skilfully into Edgar's web. Were all men like them?

She had read of some in books, who were very different, who might have been worth sparing had she ever met them in real life. Her experience made her think they must be either imaginary or so exceptional as to be very rare; she did not know that Edgar had taken care she should be thrown with only certain types.

"A richer haul than you can imagine," said Edgar, with more excitement than he cared to show. His hand trembled as he lifted a glass of wine to his lips. "What would you say," he asked, with a touch of anxiety—after all, he was not absolutely sure of her acquiescence in his plans—"to leaving the stage and becoming a lady?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she said carelessly, leaning back in her chair and clasping her hands behind her shapely head, with its mass of silky, glittering hair, which resembled spun gold. "The stage intoxicates me; I am never so thoroughly alive as when I am on the boards. It is exhilarating to feel that one rouses people and holds them in constant suspense; it gives one such a sense of power."

"But a comedy in real life? Suppose you were playing a part with people actually in earnest for the rest of the cast?"

"You don't mean it!" she exclaimed, throwing herself forward and resting her arms on the table, her blue eyes gleaming.

"And what if you were playing, not for a few hundreds a night, but for a fortune, an assured position?"

"As a *lady*, you said," she added eagerly. "I am one already, I suppose," she continued, with a touch of irony. "But what does it amount to, if I am never to be recognised? I suppose you mean I should be introduced to proper people and associate with them as one of themselves—not a mere Bohemian, received on sufferance, as now."

"Precisely. I have found the right setting, the true

atmosphere for you. It is an out-of-the-way corner of Maryland, among people who would never suspect your past; who would be horrified at the discovery that you had been an actress; who would accept you, unsuspiciously, as their equal. They are very exclusive, very exacting, and more or less refined. They would put you to your trumps, my dear."

"Delightful!" she cried, clapping her hands. "It is easy enough to move an audience by merely repeating some man's words, but to invent the dialogue for yourself, to make it suit this or that individual, to shape the action to a fitting dénouement—that would be a fine piece of work. And to be really respectable—I should enjoy that; it would be a novel experience for me."

She spoke without bitterness, with no intention of reproaching him for her social outlawry. He had done the best he could for her, she fancied; it was not his fault.

"I think the rôle would fit you like a glove," said Edgar, greatly pleased at the impression he had made. "It is that of an ingénue, and no one plays that part better. You will have to pose as my daughter. As I have told you, I had but one child, and she died years ago, a baby, but the people in Maryland don't know. No one knows, except two or three persons out West, and they are not likely to turn up. I have just ascertained that the sum of two hundred thousand dollars was bequeathed to my wife by her grandfather in Maryland, and failing her, to our child. You must be that child. The money is in the hands of trustees, including my wife's father—a clergyman. If we can lay hands on it, I may be able to buy my old home, the Manor, which I have often described to you. My brother, I hear, is nearly bankrupt. He owes me money; it ought not to be difficult to force a sale. Think of me, a sedate country gentleman, and you, the granddaughter of the rector of the parish, and my banker—if you please!"

For the first time, the actress looked thoughtful.

"It might be dangerous," she said. "Isn't it what is called obtaining money under false pretences? Suppose we were detected? Neither of us, I fancy, would care to go to jail."

"No fear of that," said Edgar. "I have thought it all over, and there isn't one chance in a thousand of discovery. It's merely a bit of comedy. Besides, if there should be a leak, the family, for their own sakes, would hush things up; no outsider will be concerned."

Ethel tossed her head with a resolute air. If they were not found out, it would make no difference to her what her culpability might be. Edgar had taught her to have no scruples. For her, as for him, life was merely a contest of wits, without regard to what Edgar was pleased to term cant ideas of morality. "At any rate," she said, "it is a pleasanter way of getting money; I shall have no odious men to entice. But do you really think I am equal to it? I don't know your people; I fancy I should have to be very proper."

"Very proper, indeed!" said Edgar, with a half-sneering laugh.

"That, in itself, might be diverting. I have never had the chance to play that part. You are sure I could carry it through? And am I really lady-like—I mean in their way?"

"Don't worry about that," said Edgar promptly. "I remember perfectly all the little tricks of speech and deportment that were considered the correct thing at the Manor in my mother's day. I taught you to be the same kind of lady my sisters were. Your manners are modelled on theirs, though I fancy you would astonish them with some of your views; they were very devout as young girls."

"I can't promise to be devout," said Ethel flippantly, "I haven't the figure for it. Somehow, I've always associated

religion with women who have no waists; it seems natural to them—a kind of refuge from utter insignificance. You've often told me piety was a waste of energy in a pretty girl. It isn't absolutely necessary for me to be devout, is it?"

"No, it isn't," said Edgar, with a satisfied laugh and a flash of something warmer than mere admiration in his glowing black eyes. She was perfect, this girl—a beautiful blonde Delilah, so innocent, so fair to the eye, who mocked at everything he wished her to mock at, who would fly straight for whatever he wanted, like an arrow shot from a bow, without a twinge or a scruple or an inconvenient thought. "You are strong enough as you are," he added. "Still, it would be more prudent to conform to religious as well as other prejudices; they're a bigoted lot, down there in the country."

"Well, it's worth trying," said Ethel. "If we fail, I can go back to the stage; I'm sure of my footing there."

"We won't fail," said Edgar, decidedly. He was confident that, with her aid, success was assured. "We will start for Maryland to-morrow," he added, "you, at any rate, will be welcomed with open arms."

CHAPTER XVI

EDGAR gave no notice to the manager of the theatre of Miss Vane's determination to quit the stage. He wished her to vanish utterly, leaving no trace. It might be inconvenient if they were followed; no one at home must be able to obtain a clue which might lead to the discovery of the actress's identity as Dick Milbank's child. His arrangements were made with the utmost secrecy, and by five o'clock on the following afternoon, he and Ethel were speeding in an express train south, leaving all their acquaintances in ignorance of their departure.

The sudden disappearance of the actress was a grievous surprise, not only to the manager of the theatre, who was making a fortune out of the engagement, but to her train of admirers, who excitedly discussed the situation in the lobby of the theatre that night. When it was discovered that Darcy Montague, too, was missing, the opinion became general that he and the actress had been bought off by some millionaire. Each wealthy roué looked suspiciously at his neighbour. Who was the successful man? Evidently, not one of those present. All of them showed a jealous anger, an eager curiosity too earnest to be feigned. Could it be that the clever rascal, Montague, had duped them all? Had he made some great coup, which had satisfied his cupidity and tempted him to run off with the beautiful girl? After all, who knew the actual relations between them? He had seemed quite indifferent to the attentions she received, and why should he not be secretly sure of her? No one could deny he was a brilliant, fascinating fellow, if verging on

middle age. It was quite possible she really cared for him. This theory seemed the most plausible. It was an irritating one, particularly for the men who had lost large sums to Edgar. They had squandered their money uselessly. The scoundrel had swindled them. The most callous suffered keenly at the thought that not only might they never see the charming actress again, but it was practically certain she had never thought seriously of them, but, all the time, had been laughing with Edgar at their folly.

They might have found some consolation in the fact, had they known it, that the actress had not left them as willingly as they supposed. As she was about to set out on her journey, Ethel had had a rude awakening. At the last moment, Edgar presented himself completely transformed. To her great astonishment, she beheld not the jaunty, black-haired swell whom she had always known — apparently robust and active—but a much older man. She had known that his youthfulness was due in part to fictitious means, but she was horrified by the reality of his appearance. At first, she thought he had assumed a disguise. When he told her, not without an effort, that she saw him as he really was, a cry of alarm and disgust escaped her. His personal influence vanished instantly. She shrank from him with a feeling of indignation as she remembered the power he had always wielded over her. Had he ever been honest with her? Was she, too, only one of his dupes?

Her eyes flashed dangerously at the thought, and she was on the point of refusing to go farther in his scheme when she reflected that, as he could do nothing without her, she might be able to get the upper hand of him, perhaps to rid herself of him altogether. Upon thinking it over, the night before, his project had grown upon her. There was now a strong incentive to make trial of it. The very fact that he had suddenly become repulsive made a change of

scenes and surroundings seem the more welcome. And if she could gain her freedom—ah, that would be worth while! All at once, she was acutely conscious of her slavery and burning to throw it off.

It was with great reluctance, however, that she actually started on the journey. The change in Edgar had upset all her calculations. Her zest in the adventure had vanished. Besides, she was afraid of him. If he could trick her so flagrantly once, he might do it again. He had deceived her grossly. How could she ever have been attracted by him had she known him for what he really was—a vicious-looking old man? She must have recoiled from him at first as she recoiled from him now. She felt the instinctive shrinking of youth and beauty from physical decay. What a silly fool she had been! How he must have gloated in secret over the ease with which he had imposed upon her! She quivered with a sense of outrage. Well, perhaps, her turn would come.

Edgar was fully conscious of the ugly impression he had made upon her, but he did not suspect the dangerous tendency of her thoughts. He suffered keenly. It cut him to the quick to feel that he was an object of repugnance to a woman—above all to her. That had never happened to him before. Her glance of astonishment, followed by one of dismay, made him feel as well as look his age. All was over, so far as his power to please her was concerned. On the other hand, he had no fear of open revolt. She was safely bound, he fancied, by the ties of habit. Besides, he knew he had roused her ambition. Her interest in the success of their undertaking was scarcely less keen than his own.

The rector of Winton parish, the Reverend Stephen Magruder, had received a brief, hurried letter from Edgar informing him of the existence of his granddaughter and apprising him of their intended visit. So confident had

Edgar been of enlisting the actress's aid, that he had hastened to communicate with the Rector as soon as he had conceived his plan. Mr. Magruder was a benignant old man, whom many trials had only sweetened. He was unsuspicious and tender-hearted, the most guileless, most ingenuous of men. His theology was broadly exculpatory and tolerant. The simplicity of country life had reduced his articles of faith to primitive terms. The fine abstractions of city pulpits seemed to him to have no place here. His parishioners had their faults and follies against which he warned them plainly, but his chief concern was to minister to their daily needs, to contribute, so far as he could, to the sum of the general happiness. He believed in happiness on earth as well as in Heaven—not perfect happiness, of course, but a degree of it, varying, in his opinion, according to circumstances, rather than the moral perversity of mankind. He gave large weight to heredity, to environment, to chance, and he liked to think a reprobate might have been a good man, had the conditions been favourable to him. In his lonely drives and walks when making the rounds of his parish, he was often conscious of a mysterious presence in Nature which seemed to him to be the impalpable vesture of God. In it, he found something infinitely broader than his own special creed, and while he preached only what he believed to be the orthodox dogmas, he infused into his sermons, as well as into his life, a loving sympathy with humanity as part of an inscrutable whole, made up of divers elements, which no earthly mind could reconcile or explain.

There was but one individual in all the world who, he feared, might prove to be irreclaimable, and this man was Edgar Cheston. The bitter sense of personal wrong doubtless influenced even his gentle spirit. He had known Edgar in early boyhood, and even then had been unable, with all his tolerance, to find much good in him. His excesses as

a young man had often grieved him, and, at length, he suffered an agonising blow at his hands, when Edgar persuaded his darling child to share his disgrace and hurried her off to her death, beyond the reach of his sympathy and love. He wrestled long with himself before he could be sure he had forgiven, and he had never yet reached the point of complete resignation to his loss. The news that his daughter's child was alive, that she was soon to be with him, seemed to him a special dispensation to requite him, as far as he could be requited, for the loneliness and grief of all these years. He fell on his knees and poured out his heart in gratitude to God. It seemed to him there might be hope of Edgar after all. He felt he could receive him, as he should receive him, kindly. Was he not bringing him an unlooked-for, a precious boon? The day of their arrival was a day of extreme agitation for him. He busied himself eagerly with every detail of preparation at the Rectory, and as the hour when they might be expected drew near, he seated himself on the front verandah and fixed his eyes on the white line of road beyond the churchyard, where any vehicle must first appear. When dinner was announced, he did not stir.

Not so his sister, Mrs. Tippett, who had been sitting beside him, placidly knitting. Ever since the death of his wife, many years before, Mrs. Tippett, a childless widow, had been the domestic ruler at the Rectory and her brother's coadjutor in the parish. She was a phlegmatic person, and on this occasion, though secretly disturbed, she did not fail, as usual, to make a satisfactory dinner. Although she sought to convey the impression of being spiritually-minded, she often betrayed a keen regard for creature comforts, and seemed to think it almost irreligious to miss a meal. Like most self-indulgent people, she was usually amiable from the desire to get on easily, with the least friction or effort. Underneath her apparent meekness, however, there was hid-

den an eager, contriving spirit. She aimed to be the source of activity throughout the parish; the providence and arbiter of every needy and distracted household; the acknowledged head of authority and of all efforts to "do good." She was not really soft-hearted, and was seldom moved by poverty or distress to any deep feeling; it happened, merely, that a meddlesome beneficence was the only means she had of obtaining power and applause. She was naturally despotic, and often insisted on "doing" for people who did not want her help; occasionally, she even went so far as to dragoon those who did not seem to know what was good for them.

The news that the Rector's granddaughter was alive and about to make her appearance on the scene affected her unpleasantly. The girl, if she were at all self-assertive, might prove troublesome. Very probably, she would have to yield the control of the household to her. The influence she had wielded so long over her gentle, absent-minded brother, would be disputed. Her great-niece might even take it upon herself to interfere in the parish work. And hardest of all to bear, she would deprive her of a large sum of money. Under the terms of the will bequeathing two hundred thousand dollars to Edgar Cheston's wife, or her child if she left one, the money was to be divided between her (Mrs. Tippett) and her brother at the end of a specified number of years, if it still remained unclaimed. As the period had almost expired, she had felt confident of receiving her share and had amused herself by considering a variety of schemes of sensational charity which the possession of so large a sum would enable her to realise. She had never felt a harder shock than when she was suddenly awakened from her day-dream by the letter from Edgar which her brother handed her with eyes moist with joyful tears. By a great effort, she managed to hide her chagrin and assume a tender air of sympathy with the Rector's delight.

The sound of carriage wheels was heard at last, and a moment later, an antiquated coach, which the Rector recognised as belonging to the tavern in the county town, turned in at the gate.

"They are here, Dorothea!" he cried, rising hastily, as his sister emerged from the hall door.

"Compose yourself, Stephen," she said, purring softly, as she paused to smooth with both hands her already sleek gray hair. She always deprecated any excitement; it was so upsetting.

As the carriage rolled up to the door, the Rector hastened down the steps, his spare form, slightly bowed, trembling visibly. A tall, white-haired man, erect and strong, with his shoulders thrown well back, sprang out of the carriage and came up the gravelled path to meet him. The Rector knew Edgar Cheston at once. But how changed from the handsome, agile young fellow who had stolen his darling's heart from him! Vice had set its ugly stamp upon him. The coarsened features, the bold, insolent eyes, the heavily graven lines in the colourless face, spoke only too plainly of prolonged indulgence of the passions. The Rector shrank from him, disillusioned; it were idle to look for reformation here; eager as he was to think less harshly of him, he could not hide from himself the sad conviction that Edgar was one who still proclaimed, "Evil, be thou my good!"

He forced himself to hold out his hands, and to say, in a broken voice,

"Welcome, Edgar."

He *was* welcome, in spite of all, because his daughter was with him.

"You have really brought me my dear one's child?" the Rector added, anxiously.

Edgar drew back with a look of alarm. What did he mean by "really"? Could the old man have heard any-

thing to excite his suspicions? Of course not. It was only a chance word that meant nothing. The expression of the Rector's face at once reassured him. There was naught but eager longing written there. For answer, Edgar turned to the carriage and gave his hand to Ethel Vane who sprang out lightly and stood gazing at the Rector with a well-acted air of timidity.

The old clergyman's fine face lit up at sight of the beautiful girl. Opening his arms, he folded her to his bosom, exclaiming softly, "Ah, my darling, I have longed for you so!"

The actress yielded herself to his caresses with something more than a pretence of warmth. She felt intuitively that he was a good man—though she knew next to nothing of goodness and had cared very little about it hitherto—and that he offered her something she had been an utter stranger to—an unselfish sympathy and love that seemed sweet to her, she could hardly have said why. Perhaps, her feeling sprang from the sense of contrast with Edgar Cheston's cold-blooded duplicity so suddenly revealed to her—a revelation that had robbed her of the only kind of affection she had ever known. For the moment, she looked what she wished to be taken for—an ingenuous, amiable girl, who was quite ready to reciprocate his tenderness. Edgar felt like applauding her skill. He thought it mere acting, and assured himself he had never seen her do anything better on the stage. He would not have been so well pleased could he have known that her naturalness of manner was due, in part, to the fact that she was touched. She felt that there was safety—even from him—with this gentle, loving old man. Old age was not hideous in him; she found something beautiful in it.

Judith Cheston, for so we must now call the actress, glanced about her with a keen sense of pleasure. What a quaint, peaceful spot her new home was! With its spacious

lawn, shaded by great oaks, its old-fashioned garden, from which was wafted the perfume of lilacs through the open doors of the odd, hip-roofed house; its perfect serenity and quiet, it seemed to her a delightful refuge. The ivy-covered little church, nestled in a clump of the largest oaks, completed a picture which appealed not only to her taste but to a latent sensibility which had never before been stirred. She felt that she might be happy here. Happy! Had she ever been happy? Years ago, perhaps, when still a careless child. But since she had been able to reason, to observe? Well, she had certainly enjoyed life. There had always been excitement, variety, the gratification of almost every whim, but there was something she had missed, she knew not what. Perhaps, she would find it here.

The Rector took her face between his hands and studied it with rapt attention.

"Yes," he said at last, "there can be no doubt about it; you are marvellously like your mother, my child."

Edgar started. Was the old fool mad? And yet, as he glanced at the actress, he saw that there *was* a resemblance. She had the same blue eyes, soft and winning; the same fleecy, golden hair; the same delicate colouring, with features even more regular, more finely cut than his wife's as he remembered her. What a lucky resemblance for him! If the Rector ever heard anything to excite his doubts, he would instantly put them away at sight of her face.

Mr. Magruder forced himself to ask Edgar to stay with him, but the latter declined.

"I must push on to the Manor," he said, "I shall have to start for Washington to-morrow. Of course," he added, with a covert sneer, "I couldn't go away without seeing the family; Mother and Bob would never forgive me."

He shook hands with the Rector and Mrs. Tippett, kissed his supposititious daughter affectionately, and jump-

ing into the carriage, bade the driver take the road for the Manor.

"It's all right," he said to himself as he rolled away, "Ethel has hooked him fast enough. What a clever girl she is! And to think she should actually resemble the parson's daughter. I call that a genuine stroke of luck. And now for my dear brother and his wife. Their day of reckoning has come!"

CHAPTER XVII

When the carriage reached the Manor gate, Edgar bade the driver pause, so that he might look about him. His keen eyes travelled eagerly over the fields which stretched in slight undulations on each side of the avenue of elms towards the house. On every hand, he noted evidences of mismanagement or neglect. The growing wheat was thin, the grass and clover choked with weeds; the ditches, in some places, scarcely distinguishable; the fences overgrown with briars. His face lit up suddenly with fierce satisfaction. "The place is going to the dogs," he muttered, "what a botch Bob has made of things!"

It was pleasant for him to fancy it might have been very different had he been the master, as it was intended he should be. At least, he wouldn't have brought the Manor to this. If he knew nothing else, he knew how to farm. "If Father could see it," he exclaimed, "how he would curse his folly in preferring Bob to me!"

The thought was intensely gratifying. In the Colonel's evident incompetence, he found a kind of justification of himself. He laughed softly, with sardonic humour, as he reflected that, had he remained at the Manor, he might have proved a safer guardian of the property and the family dignity—he the spendthrift, the good-for-nothing, the dangerous rascal, who had been driven forth in disgrace. Even yet, it was not too late. If, with Ethel Vane's aid, he secured control of the Magruder fortune, he might be enabled to settle down here and become a virtuous member of society. There would no longer be any reason to lie or to cheat, and by taking on the garb of reform, he might succeed

in hoodwinking the community into the belief that he was a changed man, and thus attain to influence and power. It was a rather inconvenient ambition for a man of his tastes, yet feasible enough, if he could but curb his cursed inclinations. "It'll be deuced hard work," he said to himself, peevishly. He was beginning already to regret the occupations, the amusements, the stirring games of chance, he had found so exhilarating in the life of cities. The quiet of the country, the tame innocuousness of the daily routine, would be insufferably dull. But there was mischief to be done. It was in his power to throw the family into confusion, to lay violent hands on its household gods, to cast out his brother, to impress the community, by quickly restoring the Manor to its former prosperity, with a conviction of his energy and force. After he had done all this, there might be other employment quite as interesting. It was at least worth while to wait and see. In the meantime, he need not lack excitement. He would be hunting the biggest game he had ever stalked; the stake was larger than any he had ever played for at poker.

Reassured, he gave the order to drive on. As he neared the house, he found that it, too, had shared the general neglect. The doors and shutters were almost bare of paint; the roof, thickly-coated with moss, showed patches of broken shingles; the verandah floor had rotted away in several places. "Bob ought to be ashamed of himself," he exclaimed, amused at feeling a kind of virtuous indignation; "I must set the carpenters at work immediately."

Pompey, the Colonel's body servant, met him at the door. When Edgar told him his name, Pompey, who was a fat, unctuous old negro, grinned from ear to ear, and executed a series of flourishing bows in his most grandiose style.

"Sobbun Marster!" he exclaimed, and shuffling sideways, he ushered Edgar into the parlour. Edgar selected

the most inviting chair, and having seated himself, looked about him with a growing sense of familiarity. Everything was worn and faded, but otherwise, just the same as when he had last seen it, more than twenty years before. A host of memories crowded swiftly upon him. They were soft memories, some of them—there had been a time when he had not been insensible to gentler impressions—and they must have touched a nature less obdurate. But to Edgar, they were almost invisible threads in a web of selfish impulses, of fierce desires. Seated here, amid these well-known surroundings, it seemed to him as though he had been suddenly restored to a place he had but just quitted; the years that had fled dwindled almost into nothingness; he was beginning all over again, and this time, with loaded dice. The desire to snatch the prize from his brother's grasp grew hot and eager within him.

The Colonel entered smiling, with outstretched hands.

"Ah, Edgar," he exclaimed warmly, "I am so glad to see you! Mr. Magruder was here yesterday, and told us the welcome news of your expected arrival. We had given you up long ago. Your daughter is with you?"

"No," said Edgar, rising to meet him, "I left her at the Rectory."

He was annoyed to find "Bob" so young. Instead of a man weighed down by misfortune, he seemed to be bubbling over with happiness and good humour. It was the easy, careless life he had led, that had held age in check and caused the burden of debt to sit so lightly upon him. It might have been the same with him had he not been cheated of the Manor. The thought added new fuel to his rancour.

The Colonel was wholly sincere in his greeting. It was easy for him to forget the dark side of Edgar's character, and to see in him once more the brilliant, dominating elder brother whom he had admired and imitated as a boy. In

his sanguine way, he imagined that age must necessarily have tempered and improved him. His long, stubborn silence, the indifference it indicated towards his mother, could probably be explained. For the Colonel, his return was a reknitting of old ties. There was genuine joy in his heart—a joy that was not affected in the least by the fact that he owed Edgar money. He would rather owe it to him than to anybody else. Was he not his brother? And Edgar's daughter would soon come into possession of a fortune which she would doubtless share with her father. Of course, Edgar wouldn't "press" him for so paltry a sum.

"Mother will be down soon," he said, "she was taking a nap. Flora, I am sorry to say, is in bed with one of her nervous attacks. Her health is very poor. My boy, Turlo, is off hunting somewhere; I've sent for Lydia, who is out in the garden. And now, tell me about yourself—what have you been doing all this time?"

"Not much of anything," said Edgar curtly—he did not wish to be questioned about his adventures—"I've been wandering about ever since I left the Manor, and have had all sorts of ups and downs."

"You're in need of money?" asked the Colonel, sympathetically. He was thinking if he were, he would borrow some from Reeve for him; Reeve was always ready to lend him.

"No," said Edgar, adding bluntly, "are you?"

"Always, more or less," answered the Colonel nonchalantly, with a laugh; "I don't know how it is, but I never seem to have enough. By the way, I owe you quite a sum."

"Yes, Reeve told me."

The Colonel imagined he had met the lawyer in the county town; he was ignorant of the meeting in New York; Reeve had not seen fit to communicate the fact to him.

"He explained to you that when your property was sold,

there was a balance? I held it for you for years, and then, having use for it, I borrowed it, with the consent of Mother and the girls. With the interest, it amounts to about twenty thousand dollars. If you want it at once, no doubt I can raise it for you."

"Don't bother yourself," said Edgar easily, "I'm in no hurry. In fact, I'd prefer you'd let the matter rest, and merely pay me the interest. It's as well invested with you as anywhere else. The Manor has no other incumbrances, has it?"

The Colonel shifted nervously in his seat. The question was embarrassing. He did not relish the idea of confessing to the brother to whom he had been preferred that he had mortgaged the Manor. But of course, he would understand.

"Yes, it has," he replied, a trifle awkwardly, "I've had to borrow rather heavily from Reeve—failures of crops, improvements, security money. In one way or another, I've had rather poor luck."

"And Reeve holds mortgages?"

"Yes."

Edgar knew better than the Colonel, whose recollection of his various borrowings was rather vague, the total amount of the mortgages. He had, in fact, a statement obtained from the court records by the agent he had employed. But he wished to extract the information from his brother; it was pleasant to cross-examine him; he fancied he was making him suffer. And, in truth, the Colonel was far from being comfortable. He had been brought face to face, for the first time, with the ugly side of his indebtedness, and he had a dim idea it was larger than he had been in the habit of thinking. He had not expected that Edgar would be so inquisitive. He began to fear he might *not* understand; that would be unpleasant.

"How would you like me to take up the mortgages?" asked Edgar, with an effort to seem careless. It was a critical moment for him—the turning-point of his brother's fate. If he accepted, he would be in his power; if he refused, he might escape him. "My daughter, Judith, will soon have some money to invest—I might place it here. You'd rather have her for a creditor, I fancy, than Reeve or any stranger. Whatever happened, then, the Manor would remain in the family."

Remain in the family! The Colonel started as if he had been stung. Had it come to that? Of course not. The Manor was good for twice the amount. But it was very considerate of Edgar. It was the kind of offer a brother should make. He would have done the same thing had their positions been reversed, but he would hardly have expected it of Edgar.

"That's a good suggestion," he said gratefully, "especially if your girl and my boy should happen to take a fancy to each other. However, it's a safe investment for her, in any event. With a little better luck, I ought to be able to pull out in a very few years. You'll help me to manage the estate, will you not? You were bred a farmer, and I was not, and I'm sure you'd soon find out what's wrong. I've done my best, but somehow, I seem to be always going backward."

"The place doesn't look very flourishing," remarked Edgar, dryly.

"No, it isn't," assented the Colonel, with a sigh. Then, brightening, he added cheerily,

"But we'll change all that. Can't you make your home with us? The Rectory isn't far away, and you could see your daughter every day. I'd like to have the benefit of your presence here."

Edgar glanced at him doubtfully. Could he be in earnest? If he were, what a fool! He was playing right into his

hands. All he needed was a footing at the Manor; once there, he would soon be its master, without having to wait until he could force its sale. But perhaps, Bob wasn't such a fool as he seemed. There might be cunning in his offer. Edgar naturally inclined to this view. He had no faith in his brother's honesty, or indeed in any man's, and was always on the alert to detect some hidden motive. Did Bob hope to use him, to fatten on him, to make him the paymaster of his extravagance and inefficiency? He smiled grimly at the thought. It mattered little whether he were fool or knave. Either way, he would beat him. He thought it more prudent, for the present, to temporise.

"I can't say just yet," he replied, with an air of indecision. "I hardly know where I shall conclude to live. I have to take a trip to Washington, and must start to-morrow. After my return, I may be able to tell you whether I can accept your offer. But so far as the mortgages are concerned, you need give yourself no further anxiety; we'll arrange it with Reeve, as soon as Judith's affairs are settled. In the meantime, it would be better if you said nothing to him; he might not wish to relax his grip on the property, and perhaps, would give us trouble."

"Very well," said the Colonel, promptly. He did not share Edgar's apprehension in the least—the idea of Reeve presuming to give trouble! On the other hand, he had never liked him; his manners were very objectionable. It would be a relief to get rid of him.

The conversation was interrupted by Pompey with the announcement that the family doctor, who had just paid a visit to the younger Mrs. Cheston, wished to see the Colonel in the library.

The Colonel rose, with an anxious look, and begged Edgar to excuse him. "Mother will be with you, presently," he added, "I'll return as soon as I can."

The door had scarcely closed behind him when a heavy curtain that divided the long parlour into two rooms was thrust aside, and his wife entered. She had been a hidden auditor of nearly the whole conversation, and she now came forward, white and trembling.

Edgar gazed at her in astonishment. Who was she? Some crack-brained guest of the family? Her anxious face and wild, dark eyes strengthened the impression made by her strange, furtive entrance. He had no suspicion of her identity. What trace was there in this emaciated, gray-haired woman of the vivacious, beautiful girl who had once seemed to him so captivating?

"You don't know me, Edgar!" she exclaimed in a pitiful tone, stopping short.

"Flora!" he cried, aghast. Her voice recalled her to him; it was the one thing of her former self that remained.

She stood before him, with downcast head, like a prisoner awaiting sentence. There was a heavy reckoning between them. He had wronged her foully, but she had inflicted a savage blow in return. It was she who, knowing of his secret embarrassments, had revealed them to his father, and had thus set on foot an investigation that had resulted in the discovery that he was utterly profligate. The loss of the Manor, the misfortunes that had followed, were all due to her. And she knew that he had discovered the fact, for he had written her, shortly after his departure, and again after his wife's death, telling her he had her to thank, and some day would endeavour to repay her. He was here, no doubt, to exact reparation. The blow she had so long dreaded was about to fall. But how? What form of torture would his vengeance take? Quivering in every nerve, she nevertheless longed to know the worst. It was the suspense that was hardest to bear. Informed by Phyllis of Edgar's arrival, she had risen from bed and stolen down-

stairs to watch for an opportunity of seeing him alone. She waited in an agony of fear less they should be surprised before she had heard what he had to say. She little dreamed there was a witness of their interview. Phyllis had followed her like a shadow, and was now crouching behind the portière, her sullen face alive with fierce curiosity, her black eyes glowing with baleful fire. The woman she hated, the man she had worshipped were face to face at last, and she was there, to hear them.

"Pardon me," said Edgar, recovering himself quickly and handing her a chair with his suavest bow. "We have both changed with the flight of years."

She did not sit down, but stood leaning against the back of the chair, weak and faint.

"Time has not dealt gently with me," she said.

"Nor with me." His tone was still pleasant, but his eyes flashed dangerously as he added, "On the other hand, it has been wonderfully lenient with Bob; *his* lines have evidently been cast in pleasant places."

"You will not hurt him!" she exclaimed. Clasping her hands in entreaty, she added, "Oh Edgar, whatever you may have against me, he is innocent! He would have scorned to take the least advantage of you. He would even have defended you to your father against his own interests, had he known. Do with me what you like, but spare him!"

A faint smile curled Edgar's lips. Did she expect him to believe this? Yes, it seemed so, in spite of all that had happened. Apparently, she and her husband were working in concert to "pluck" him. His brother, then, was more knave than fool, and had an enterprising ally in his wife. But she must not suspect that he saw through her game; it was not yet time for him to show his hand.

"My dear Flora," he said, with affected surprise, "how strangely you talk! Hurt Bob? Why should I hurt him?

Possibly, you overheard us just now. You did? Well, you know that I mean to help him. Could I have made him a more brotherly offer? I propose to forego my claim—at least, for the present—to take up the mortgages, to make things easy for him, and yet, you ask me not to hurt him!"

Mrs. Cheston was not reassured; on the contrary, her terror grew. His honeyed phrases did not deceive her. To her keen intuition, they meant only that he wished to keep her in the dark. He was veiling some purpose she could not fathom. Her suspense, instead of being ended, was to be prolonged.

"You are very kind," she stammered, feeling that she must affect to believe him, "I—I—feared you might hold Robert as well as myself responsible for—for all that has happened. I wished to convince you that he had nothing to do with it—nothing. As for me, whatever I have done, I have been punished for it already. Can you not see how I must have suffered?"

"Why trouble yourself with such fancies, dear Flora?" asked Edgar, indulgently. "You will fret yourself into a fever about nothing. I assure you I have only the kindest feeling towards you."

The unhappy woman shivered. How could he have the hardihood to lie to her in this way? She knew the hatred that must be lurking under his words. He was torturing her far more by his affectation of friendliness than if he had openly vented his wrath upon her, and doubtless, he knew it.

Footsteps sounded in the hall. With a look of alarm, she turned to leave him. "Don't speak to anyone of having seen me," she murmured hastily, "they think I am ill in bed."

She groped her way blindly toward the portière, and Edgar sprang forward to raise it. As he did so, he just grazed Phyllis, who, unable to escape in time, was hiding at

one side, in terror of detection. Fortunately for her, he lifted the other half of the curtain. Mrs. Cheston hurried on, without looking round, and made her escape just as Ole Miss entered the next room. Phyllis stole noiselessly after her.

Edgar dropped the curtain and turned to meet his mother.

"That was a bad quarter of an hour for her," he said to himself, with a chuckle.

It gave him keen pleasure to wring the heart of this woman whom he had once loved, after his fashion. But for her, he might have been in his rightful place—the place his brother had filched from him—during all the time he had been a homeless wanderer. But for her, he might have grown old easily and slowly. But for her, he need never have become the adventurer, the blackleg, the petty rascal he knew himself to be. And now, he had her in his power. She was weak and prematurely old and wretched. So much the better. He might have feared her had she remained the bright, daring creature who had outwitted him once. Her spirit was broken; he could do with her whatever he wished.

Edgar sat up until late in the night regaling the family assembled in the hall with the recital of his adventures. He was a practised story-teller, and held his audience engrossed with his vivid descriptions of life on the plains. His mother hung upon his words with love beaming in her eyes. Edgar had been her spoiled darling, and not even his long years of silence—a silence she had found it hard, at first, to forgive—had extinguished the old fondness in her heart. He was the prodigal come back again, repentant and reformed. She put the fullest faith in his professions, and rejoiced, with all her soul, that he had come in time to rescue his brother, to save the Manor. More clear-sighted than the Colonel, she had long been anxious about the state of his affairs, and had felt that a stronger hand than his was

needed. Edgar seemed strong. At first, she had been conscious of a hardness in him which had grieved her, but this impression gradually yielded to the conviction that his character had merely developed on firmer lines. The rash impetuosity of his youth had been converted into the sober but strongly impelling force of middle age. His forms of expression, at times, were curt and even rough, but that was to be expected of one who had had to fight many hard battles for existence in a wild, lawless land. His energy, however rude it might be, was precisely what was required at the Manor. It supplied the elements lacking in Robert. He had doubtless learned much, especially the value of money. Everything was turning out for the best, after all. Perhaps, had Edgar remained at home, he would not have acquired the qualities she now admired in him. He *had* been indolent and dissipated and careless; the easy life at the Manor might have confirmed him in habits of self-indulgence. The hardships he had suffered had cured all that and made a man of him.

The Colonel's wife was missing from the family group surrounding Edgar. She was near at hand, however, though unseen. Kneeling at the head of the stairs, her thin hands clutching the banisters, she listened eagerly to every word he uttered. The exclamations of interest or amusement from one or the other of his hearers, from time to time, wounded her cruelly. "They believe him," she murmured to herself, trembling with fear and pain. "He has won the confidence of every one of them. And he means to bring misery upon them all—even his old mother. Yes, I know it. Oh, why did I ever cross him? Why did I yield to my mad thirst for revenge? I had my revenge, and he means to have his, now. I can do nothing to avert it—nothing!"

CHAPTER XVIII

EDGAR did not wait to note the effect of the actress's first appearance at the Manor. He had but little anxiety on that score. She had conducted herself so cleverly at the Rectory that he was confident she would not fail to make a favourable impression. He had cautioned her as to certain points, and she never needed to be told a thing twice. He departed without any misgivings, and was well on his way towards Washington when Judith and the Rector made their first visit.

It was the morning after her arrival. The Rector was so proud of her that he wished her father's family to see her without delay. Immediately after breakfast, they set out in his old, yellow-bodied gig drawn by a sleepy, fat gray horse. Mrs. Tippett, prompted by curiosity, had tried to persuade him it was her "place" to introduce her great-niece, but the Rector showed unaccustomed obstinacy, and almost irritably refused to yield. Mrs. Tippett retired at last with rather bad grace. His conduct was unpleasantly significant. It marked, to her mind, the beginning of the end of her petty despotism.

Judith's welcome was all that she or the Rector, even, could have wished. The Colonel came out to the carriage to greet her, and Ole Miss and Lydia were waiting in the parlour to receive her. Even the Colonel's wife, though exhausted by the suffering she had undergone throughout the night, insisted on being helped downstairs by Phyllis. She was impelled by an anxious desire to learn what manner of girl Judith was, and whether she was likely to befriend her. Surely if anyone could influence Edgar, it would be

his daughter. If she could but win her sympathy! She did not hope for much, but some softening of Edgar's purpose, at least, might be gained from her intercession.

Judith's beauty and grace instantly captivated the impressionable Colonel. Ole Miss was not so easily subdued. To Judith, she seemed at first a severe old lady, and the self-conscious girl was almost afraid to meet her scrutinising gaze. But after a rather formal greeting, which had enabled her to take her in from head to foot, Ole Miss thawed quickly, and bending over, kissed her. She had satisfied herself that she was worthy of bearing the family name. Lydia took one of Judith's hands and pressed it rather timidly. She was too shy to offer to kiss her. The tall, beautiful creature impressed her with a sense of aloofness. She was unlike most of the girls she had known. There was an air of distinction about her, of confident ease, of familiarity with the great world, showing itself in slight, subtle hints, that made Lydia feel inferior. She feared she might commit some blunder that would expose her rusticity. Though longing to "make friends" at once, she shrank from seeming to presume upon their relationship. Her unwonted humility had in it a spice of pride; she did not fancy the idea of being rebuffed. Her embarrassment was increased by a side remark of Uncle Josias. "*She* knows how to behave," he whispered to her, maliciously. "Someone has taught her manners." Miss Twiggs, too, seemed lost in admiration. It was evident everybody felt as she did. There was a throb of jealous pain in Lydia's heart. All at once, she had been deposed and made insignificant. Her star had paled before that of this beautiful cousin.

The Colonel's wife came in after the others. Judith, who had been informed by Edgar of their former relations and present attitude towards each other, felt a peculiar sense of interest as she met the gaze of those pleading eyes. Inter-

preting his story in the light of her new knowledge of him, she read a dark tragedy in them. She did not doubt that this frail, broken woman had suffered cruelly at his hands. She, too, had been deceived and played with—perhaps more wantonly than even *she* had been. She was moved by a strong sense of kinship in their common experience—a touch of genuine pity.

Mrs. Cheston read the pity in her face, and felt a faint glow of hope. She would do her best to make a friend of this girl.

The warmth and evident sincerity of her reception made it unnecessary for Judith to play a part. All she had to do was to accept things as they were and to be herself—a lady-like young woman, with the finish of manner which Edgar had been at so much pains to secure. In any fashionable drawing-room, she would have been pronounced what, nowadays, is called "good form." At the Manor, she excited a friendly curiosity. She was a specimen of the society of cities which was more or less unfamiliar to so secluded a household. No doubt, she could tell them of fashions, of customs, of social observances which, as yet, had not penetrated to their neighbourhood. She was, for them, an interesting object of study, if not of imitation. On the other hand, they accepted her unquestioningly as one of themselves. With a grateful sense of relief, she fell at once into the place thus offered her as a member of the family. She no longer felt any anxiety, and was thoroughly confident of herself. Her future seemed secure.

The feeling of security was but brief. Lydia asked her, rather doubtfully, if she wouldn't like to see the garden, and leaving the older people, they strolled for an hour or more along the winding paths or over the broad stretches of velvety turf. Suddenly, Lydia pulled from her belt an old-fashioned watch, and glancing at it, exclaimed:

"It is time to give Mamma her medicine; I had nearly forgotten. Will you excuse me? I'll be back in a few moments."

Judith assented, preferring to linger in the garden, and as Lydia hurried away, she turned into a gravelled path that ended at a clump of oaks where she saw a seat. She had taken but a few steps when a tall figure, rounding a large box tree from a by-path, nearly collided with her. It was Turlo Cheston, coming from the stable where he had just left his horse after his customary morning gallop with the hounds.

"Miss Vane!" he cried, his handsome, boyish face lighting up. "Is it possible—you here!"

Miss Vane! The name sounded almost strange to her. She had already identified herself so closely with her new life, that her career on the stage was beginning to seem like a dream. Who was this intruder from that other world who had recalled to her so unexpectedly what she wished to forget? She glanced at him, striving to place him. She could not remember ever to have seen this dark, eager face, with brilliant black eyes, ruddy cheeks, a passionate mouth. He was a striking-looking young fellow; surely, if she had ever met him, she would not have forgotten him. But then, she had met so many young men.

She suspected at once that he was another "cousin," the brother of whom Lydia had spoken.

"You seem to know me," she said, recovering her presence of mind and smiling a little constrainedly, "but you don't. I'm Miss Vane no longer; my name is Judith Cheston. And you?"

"Turlo Cheston—very much at your service," he said laughing, with a low bow.

"We are cousins, then."

"I wish I'd known it when I was in New York," he ex-

claimed, a frank admiration showing itself in his eyes, "I wouldn't have been so timid when Jasper Ninian took me behind the scenes."

She remembered now, though his face was still unfamiliar to her. Jasper Ninian was a rich young dandy who haunted the wings and ogled all the pretty chorus girls. She had known him as one of the most profitable of Mr. Darcy Montague's "friends." One night, she remembered, he had asked leave to present to her a former college chum from the country, and she had been amused by his protégé's diffidence and confusion when she attempted to talk to him. This must be he. What an awkward contretemps! To be known to one of the family as the former star of burlesque! All her self-confidence was gone. It was even possible Edgar's fraud might be exposed, and by one of those chances which they had fancied were so remote. But stop —they were alone; no one else knew as yet; there was still hope. She glanced at Turlo again; he seemed a raw country youth, and was, probably, unsophisticated. It was easy to see that he admired her; in fact, she would have taken that for granted.

"Can you keep a secret?" she demanded.

"Yes, for your sake," he answered promptly.

"It is for my sake. I do not wish anyone here to know I was ever on the stage. Not that I need be ashamed of it; it was necessary for me to earn a living somehow, and that was the easiest way. But I might be placed in a trying position; the family, I fancy, would not care to have it said that one of their number had been an actress."

"I—I'm afraid they wouldn't," confessed Turlo, looking down and scraping the gravel at his feet in sudden embarrassment.

"Perhaps, you share their prejudices?"

"No, indeed, not where you are concerned." He paused,

and added impulsively, "I never associated you with what Jasper, told me of the life of the stage. When he spoke slightingly of you, I wanted to kick him."

"You thought me superior to my surroundings?" said Judith, with a hollow laugh. He was even more unsophisticated than she had hoped.

"Yes. Shall I tell you? I felt the atmosphere was bad: when I saw you in the midst of those men whom I had heard talk at clubs, I knew the life wasn't natural to you; that you must shrink from them; and I felt so sorry." He did not tell her he had longed to bear her away from their insolent gaze and set her upon a pedestal for his own private worship, but she instantly guessed as much. It was evident he had been smitten by her, and there was now a kind of joyous passion in his gaze. He might become inconvenient—this rash, ardent boy, but he was necessary to her, and she must bind him fast. "Do you know what you reminded me of?" he continued, growing bolder. "Of a white flower, such as I have often seen in our swamps, which keeps itself pure in the black mud of a bog."

"Why, you're quite a poet!" she exclaimed with a laugh, feeling sure of him now.

"I'm no poet," he said, flushing. "I say it only because it's true. It seems wonderful that you should be my cousin; I was afraid you might be some dull, ugly girl."

"Thanks!" she said merrily—she was quite at her ease once more—"I'm so glad you like me. But Jasper Ninian—if he were to come here——"

"No fear of that. He has just gone abroad to stay several months. Besides, I'll take good care he doesn't set foot in this neighbourhood."

"You really are a kind cousin," she exclaimed, gratefully, "I think we're going to be very good friends."

He looked at her, thinking what a lucky fellow he was,

and as he looked, his hopes mounted high. It wouldn't be his fault if they remained only friends. How delightful to know she trusted him; that he was the only one who knew her secret! It was a bond between them which he might be able to knit closer, with the happiest results.

When Lydia returned, she found Judith and Turlo chatting freely. Had Turlo been a trifle less inflamed, he might have had some qualms about the association of his sister with a girl of Judith's experiences. But he saw only with the eyes of love. Judith *must* be all she should be because he wished to believe her so. Besides, she was their cousin. That fact would have settled any doubts in his mind. And Lydia, he would have decided, was well able to take care of herself. She was pert enough in calling him to account for any lapses from propriety.

Judith, who had been attracted to Lydia from the first, decided it might be worth while to cultivate her. If she could make a friend of the sister, as well as of the brother, her position would be all the stronger. She feared she might prove to be difficult. There were contradictions in her that Judith found puzzling. She was friendly, and yet distant; beautiful, but apparently unconscious of the fact; odd and often abrupt in manner, yet refined—a strange mixture of undisciplined impulse and watchful reserve. Judith wondered if she approved of her. She felt rather apprehensive of her judgment. Their standards, no doubt, were widely different. This proudly shy little country girl was, perhaps, a rigorous critic, with primitive, uncompromising ideas which might prove embarrassing. Had they anything in common?

Judith led the way to the seat beneath the oaks and set herself to the task of drawing Lydia out. She soon discovered that her fears were groundless. Lydia responded to her advances with evident pleasure. It was a relief to her to find that Judith did not hold herself superior. She

was not formidable, after all, but just a nice, unaffected girl. Lydia warmed to her at once.

"She's charming," she exclaimed to her father, when they returned to the house, "I feared she mightn't care for me, but she will, I'm sure. I've always wanted a girl friend, and Judith is just the kind I would have chosen. She is lovely in every way, and knows so much more than your little ignoramus!"

Lydia's first step toward intimacy was to bear her off to her own room. It was a quaint little room, over the library wing, with dainty furniture and the atmosphere of delicacy which always invests the sanctuary of an innocent young girl. A corner near the bed was occupied by a small table covered with a snowy cloth on which stood a silver candlestick with a wax taper, flanked by a Bible and a Prayer Book. On the wall above, hung a porcelain miniature of Guido's head of the Saviour crowned with thorns. This was Lydia's altar, at which she said her prayers. It was a holy spot for her; she never approached it without a stirring of the religious feeling which, in spite of her apparent negligence, was so deeply rooted in her heart.

Judith paused at the threshold, half afraid to enter. Her presence seemed a kind of desecration. Innocence was something she had once known, but she had long thought of it indifferently as one of the crudities of childhood, which are discarded as one grows older. True, Lydia was little more than a child, but here, in this room, her purity seemed to be innate, pervasive, enduring; Judith found herself imagining it might have prevailed against even *her* temptations. A spasm of pain contracted her features at the thought. She envied this girl; beside her, she suddenly felt the lack of something she had never valued before.

Lydia soon began to talk freely of herself, of her various interests and occupations. As she proceeded, Judith's

jealousy waxed stronger. Lydia's candid frankness stung her. Evidently, she had nothing to conceal. Her life was not a sham; no doubt, it had always been genuine, open, free. Judith was conscious of no inclination to be better than she was. Good, for its own sake, would have seemed but tasteless fruit to her, for so Edgar Cheston had taught her. But Lydia's simplicity was something to be desired because it was impossible for her. It stamped her with an independence, a proud fearlessness which she would have liked to feel. "I might have been what she is," she said to herself bitterly, "but for *him*." Yes—she saw it now—he had deceived her also in this, belittling and sneering at the innocence which, left to herself, she might have preserved. She had flung it away at his bidding, in careless ignorance of its value. How was she to know? She had never been taught, as most girls are taught, to cherish it as her most precious treasure—the lustrous pearl of a virtuous womanhood to be guarded jealously as something that a single breath of evil would sully. It was only now, in this new atmosphere, that she began to regret the loss of it, and, as yet, it was envy alone that caused her distress. She had not yet wakened to the sense of shame.

"I must be careful with her," Judith said to herself, with an angry glance at Lydia. She could easily imagine what such a girl would think of her. "She would show no mercy —she is of my own sex," she added, cynically. "If she were another Turlo, now"—a scornful smile played about her mouth. She had no fear of masculine judgments. Her beauty had always turned the scale. Her confidence was that of a Phryne appealing to what, she had been taught, outweighed all else in the eyes of men.

Meanwhile, Lydia chattered on, delighted at being able to make a confidante of her lovely cousin. She even told her, with but few reservations, of her relations with Basil Kent

and Oswald Reeve. An artless, enthusiastic girl delights in sharing her inmost thoughts with one of her own sex and age, because she hopes to find the kind of sympathy she craves. Lydia saw no reason for not indulging this inclination with Judith. Was she not her cousin? Judith encouraged her, at first, from mere politeness, but in a little while, she began to be interested. Lydia had her "affairs," then; had she things to hide, after all? Judith longed to probe her, to put her to the test, in the hope that she might find some blemish in her. She would have rejoiced in the discovery that she was not so candid as she seemed.

Lydia's references to Basil Kent finally aroused Judith's curiosity.

"What sort of person is he?" she asked.

She was not especially interested in Oswald, whom Lydia had described more particularly. He seemed to her to be a mere lay figure—a handsome young man of the world of the kind that had trooped about her in shoals. It was a type that had long since palled upon her. But Basil, from what Lydia had said, might be worth considering.

"How can I tell you?" said Lydia, laughing. "Most people think him an oddity. They say he is awkward and solemn and hard to make out. I never found him so—but then, we've known each other ever since I was a baby; I suppose I am used to him. However, he *has* been rather queer of late." She paused and added, with a touch of shyness, "He bothers me, sometimes—that's the truth. I am really fond of him—we have always been such friends—but he wants something more. Men are very exacting, are they not?"

"Very!" said Judith, with a laugh. She understood. Was Lydia sincere or merely affecting impatience of a lover's attentions? She decided she could tell more about it when she met Basil Kent.

As it happened, she met him that afternoon. Basil came to the Manor ostensibly with a message from his father to the Colonel, but really, to see Lydia. Judith did not find him "solemn." He was certainly serious, and at first, rather shy. Judith soon put him at his ease. In a little while, they were talking together as freely as though they had known each other for some time. She managed him with the quiet tact of a woman of experience, questioning him adroitly about this and that, until finally, she hit upon subjects upon which he could talk with no sense of effort. As he talked, she began to grow interested. He was a man unlike any she had ever known. His language was simple and direct, his manner free from affectation, his ideas unusual. His very shyness pleased her, as distinguishing him still more sharply from the kind of men who had always thronged about her—the glib, self-confident egotists whom Edgar Cheston had made her flatter and cajole.

Basil, on his part, found it pleasanter than he could have believed possible to talk with another girl in Lydia's presence. It was surprising to find how many interests they had in common. They liked the same books, it seemed; they were both fond of music, of pictures, of country life. Basil began to think that Judith's kinship to Lydia accounted for the enthusiasm she showed in speaking of outdoor exercises; she must have inherited the instinct from a common strain of blood. But she was unlike Lydia in other ways. She was no impetuous child, but a well-balanced, cultivated young woman, who had evidently moved in the best society and travelled extensively. And she found it worth her while to question him, whom women usually treated as a negligible quantity. He was flattered, in spite of his modesty and strong good sense.

Lydia watched Basil with an air of mischievous amusement. What had happened to him? How wonderfully he

was "getting on"! She had never seem him so animated with any girl but herself.

"I congratulate you," she said to Judith with a laugh, when he had left them. "You seemed to have no trouble to make him talk."

"Is that so very difficult?" asked Judith. "He doesn't strike me as being dull."

"Oh, no; but usually with girls, he finds it hard to say anything."

"Some girls, you mean," suggested Judith. "But with you, he's never at a loss?"

"No," said Lydia, blushing, "but that's different; we've always been—well, like brother and sister, you know."

"But he bothers you sometimes, you said," remarked Judith, carelessly. "You ought to be grateful to me if I'm able to take him off your hands, now and then."

"It would be so good of you!" laughed Lydia.

Judith glanced at her, puzzled. She was still unable to determine whether Lydia was really indifferent or not. If she were not, she was very clever. It might be that this "little country girl" was a better actress than herself.

CHAPTER XIX

JUDITH soon found herself to be an object of popular curiosity and attention. People flocked to the Rectory to meet her. The story of Edgar Cheston's return to the Manor, in prosperous circumstances, after having so long been considered dead, and his daughter's arrival to claim her great-grandfather's fortune just as it was about to pass into the possession of the Rector and Mrs. Tippett, travelled fast through the county and excited the liveliest interest. Invitations poured in upon her. The generous hospitality which was so marked a characteristic of Tidewater life exerted itself prodigally to please her. It seemed as if the chief object of effort at the plantation houses was to "entertain" somebody, and for the time being, she was everywhere the guest of honour. The "Quality," apparently, had no serious cares. They were always ready for a fox-hunt, a dance or a dinner. Young and old participated, on such occasions, with equal zest and vivacity. They were like so many children in their eager pursuit of pleasure, as if nothing else really mattered.

It was amusing to her to note what an important part "good eating" played in their scheme of enjoyment. A fine dinner was an achievement which seemed to be an object of general felicitation. The table at every house groaned with an embarrassing profusion of viands. Judith was introduced, with obvious pride, to a great variety of dishes which were peculiar to the Tidewater region. She laughingly confessed to the Colonel, one day, that she was in mortal terror of growing fat. "Whenever I go out to dine," she said, "I'm afraid to refuse anything lest I give offence. Everybody

seems so bent upon making me eat; so proud and happy if I have a good appetite!"

The plantation customs were a constant source of amusement to her. She greatly enjoyed the formal visits she paid to this or that "first family," with its stiff etiquette, its rigid ceremonies, its careful inquiries about her health, her accomplishments, her special tastes. The elaborate gallantries of the men, the obsolete airs and graces of the women were very diverting. It was really like a play. There was an atmosphere of bland complacency, of settled contentment and repose in these old homes that spoke to her dreamily of generations of special privilege and exemption from disturbing influences. The very clocks had ticked, with the same monotonous regularity, for perhaps a hundred years. The servants were descendants of half a dozen generations of well-trained slaves. Everything ran on in well-worn grooves; everything would doubtless continue to run on thus, indefinitely, for life here seemed impregnable to the outer world.

"You were right," she wrote once to Edgar in Washington. "I have never had so interesting a part to play or one that required a nicer art. I am 'put to my trumps,' as you predicted. I presume it is the feeling of suspense that keeps me from being ennuyé. I often wonder at myself. The people who knew me on the stage would wonder still more. It would seem absurd to them that I could be content with so humdrum a life. At times, when things are more than usually soporific—after these heavy dinners, for example, when people sit about and stare at each other and drone of trivialities—I feel like springing up and shocking them with a pirouette or breaking out into one of my naughtiest songs. But the temptation is only momentary. Upon the whole, I like this torpor—it is so restful—and the people are very amusing. Besides, it is delightful to be respectable. Per-

haps, it is really my vocation to be a lady after all. On the other hand, there are exciting moments when I find myself about to tumble into pitfalls of prejudices, of strange points of view, of moral affectations which you left out—unwisely, as I think—from your scheme of education for me. Fortunately, my new friends seem willing to make very liberal allowances, and when, by any accident, I am more than ordinarily audacious—of course, I never mean to be—their attitude is kindly compassionate, as though saying among themselves, 'Poor thing, she wasn't brought up like us; how could she be expected to know better?'"

To Judith's great surprise, she discovered that, in spite of their very free habits, there was an almost fanatical intolerance among the Tidewater men, as well as the women, in matters of religion. Fortunately, she made the discovery in time to avoid betrayal of her indifference. Men who drank hard and occasionally slipped out an oath, even in the presence of ladies, would discuss theological questions at the dinner table with the utmost earnestness, and apparently, with actual relish. Scepticism seemed to be an unknown thing. Evidently, it was taken for granted that everyone believed in God; that no one could presume to doubt the propriety of eternal damnation.

At first, noting the frequent contrasts between profession and practice, she was inclined to think that many of these zealots must be hypocritical; but, gradually, she became convinced that nearly all of them were sincere. Even those who were open backsliders did not seem to question a creed that bore heavily upon them, but accepted it in its entirety without demur, and applied it with unsparing rigour to others. Doubtless, it was a form of bigotry which, inconsistent as it seemed, was, after all, a natural product of narrowing conditions. These people knew of no other ideas and were wholly ignorant of the many influences which came into play

elsewhere—influences such, for example, as had directed and controlled her life.

Her life ! What consternation it would excite among them if they but knew ! The rustic purists who admired her so frankly, who fêted her so generously, would they not shrink from her as contaminating if they suspected even a tithe of the truth ? Well, why should she care ? They didn't know. And after all, what was their condemnation to her ? She had long considered herself exempt from accountability to standards which had no practical meaning for her, which were incapable of being enforced against her. It were silly to concern herself about delinquencies which were serious only as they might offend these poor, narrow souls. Nevertheless, she began to be disturbed. The absolute confidence of their opinions weighed upon her. At first, she had gone to church and had knelt with the Rector at family prayers without the least scruple, regarding such acts as wholly perfunctory, but one Sunday afternoon, she was made to realise that something more was required. It was "communion" Sunday, and the Rector had noticed with pain that she had not come forward with the other communicants. After dinner, while they were strolling alone together in the garden, he turned to her with an air of grave solicitude.

"You did not come to communion, my child," he said gently. He imagined merely that she had not felt herself to be in the proper frame of mind, and wondered what trifling sin she could have upon her conscience.

She drew back, frightened. It had not occurred to her that he would ask this of her. What answer could she make ? How could she tell him that she had only the vaguest idea of what the communion meant ? She knew it was a rite of peculiar solemnity and one in which she had no claim to share. Mere conformity was one thing ; to take an active part in religious observances, to profess herself a zealous

believer—that was going farther than she liked. But as the Rector's granddaughter, she would be expected to fully share his faith. How was she to escape? Edgar hadn't thought of this when he proposed the "bit of comedy" for her. Or perhaps he had, and considered it easy. But it wasn't easy. Something within her stirred in revolt.

"I had no right," she stammered.

"No right!" exclaimed the Rector, horrified. "Surely, you can't mean you have never been confirmed?"

"Confirmed? What is that?" she asked, bewildered. She had never heard of the word in its ecclesiastical sense; she was ignorant even as to whether she had been baptised. Religious instruction was something that neither her father nor Edgar had deemed it necessary to impart.

The Rector turned away from her with a groan. This was dreadful. He would not have believed it even of Edgar Cheston. It seemed incredible that, himself reared in the Church, he should have permitted his daughter to grow up in ignorance of the most primary facts of religion. And she so brilliant, so well-informed in other things! No time must be lost in repairing this terrible wrong. Tenderly, pityingly, he expounded to her his simple creed, in full confidence that this was all that was needed to win her to his fold. She listened to him indifferently, at first, feeling it were hardly worth while. He little knew what unpromising material he was trying to work with! As he went on, his words became painful to her. His definitions of goodness, of Christian aspiration, of what it was indispensable to believe, of what to reject, brought sharply before her mind the pictures of her past which contrasted most strongly with his ideas. Was it possible she had been so culpable? She shuddered at his unconscious indictment of her. It seemed to her that she was everything he would wish her not to be. And this was not all; to satisfy his requirements, she must strive for a barren

perfectibility that was not only unattractive but repugnant to her because it exacted impossible sacrifices. Its primary element was truthfulness. The whole structure of the Rector's code was built up about the one central fact of a virtue that her mere presence beside him denied to her.

How could she be truthful? That would mean to abandon her imposture, to give up all she had won—position, wealth, the esteem which was so grateful to her. There was Basil Kent, for instance. She had come to value this man's friendship; was she tamely to suffer the loss of it? And the Rector himself—she was beginning to love him; must she confess to him that she was a cheat? No, she couldn't afford it. It would be to surrender material benefits for a mere idea, a shadowy satisfaction of impulses which were absurd in her. It was too ridiculous! Who was she to be squeamish? Whatever might be the extenuating circumstances in her ignorance, her youth, the evil tutelage of Edgar Cheston, the fact remained that she was what she was of her own choice: she was simply following the law of her desires. Yes, she would have done it all over again, deliberately, as the only possible means of satisfying her special needs, her longings, her ambition. The Rector had succeeded in making her uncomfortable, but the "conscience" he had talked about —she felt no pricks. She laughed in scorn at the thought that any motive other than self-interest could seriously weigh with her. It was annoying to have to deceive people who attached so much importance to their arbitrary moralities— that was all!

For some weeks, Judith had been thrown a good deal with Basil Kent. Whenever she went to the Manor, he was there, and he came often to the Rectory. Mrs. Tippett one day told her, with a significant smile, that they now saw Basil much more frequently. To her other functions, Mrs. Tippett added that of matchmaker for the parish. She hoped to

bring about the marriage of Judith and Basil. It would be a convenient solution of her difficulties. With Judith out of the way, she would soon regain her lost dominion over her brother.

Basil found an increasing pleasure in Judith's companionship. She appealed to him not only because she was charming, but because she seemed to divine his thoughts, to sympathise with his views, to be congenial to him mentally in a way that not even Lydia had ever been. For the first time in his experience, he was thrown with an accomplished woman, young, beautiful, sparkling with wit and humour, who did not shrink from his seriousness, but seemed to find pleasure in it. How could he suspect that he had to do with a clever *poseuse* whose special business it was to study men, to find out their weak points, and then, fool them to the top of their bent? She had read him easily, in spite of his strangeness to her. It was evident he was terribly in earnest about things. It would not do to trifle with him as she had trifled with other men; he would not understand—she might easily shock him. It were something new and exciting to try her skill with him. He might prove worthy of her nicest art. At all events, he was sure not to be commonplace; in his way, he might be amusing.

It was a kind of flirtation for which she had been intentionally trained. Edgar had anticipated the possibility of association with serious men, and for that reason, had taken pains to give her a broad education. He knew that nothing could add so strong a provocation to her beauty as the ability to converse with them sympathetically, to cater to their intellectual conceit and flatter them with the notion that their minds were attractive to her. These so-called wise men were often such fools! Judith soon convinced herself that, in Basil's case, this subtle form of flattery would work like a charm. It was, in fact, the more effective with him because

it was distinctly reassuring. It encouraged him to hope that he had been mistaken, after all, in assuming that women were necessarily impatient of qualities in him which were the opposite of those he had envied in men who had so often humbled him in their presence. There was one woman, at any rate, who always welcomed him with a smile; who talked with him by the hour with no sign of weariness or effort; who even exhibited curiosity as to his impressions, his opinions of things, and eagerly challenged him to discussion.

Basil had to admit to himself that, at times, she was rather daring; more than once, she almost took his breath away by her free handling of subjects which no woman had ever ventured to discuss in his presence. Her mental attitude was wholly unlike that of the typical plantation lady. Many of the Tidewater women were bookish; not a few had literary tastes which found expression chiefly in elaborate epistles to their friends in which wit and fancy clothed themselves in many a quaint, pedantic form. But their intellectuality kept well within safe bounds; it never strayed beyond the borders of a circumspect domesticity. Judith seemed to think the mind was untrammelled; with apparent unconsciousness, she ranged at will over territory which Basil had been taught to look upon as forbidden to her sex. But it was easy to reconcile this with a healthy nature, when he reflected that she had been reared in a different atmosphere: she had doubtless been trained to think independently, to inquire, without regard to conventions which, after all, might be merely local. He had but to look into her eyes, which had the trick of innocence, to convince himself that she was guiltless of intention.

Judith had soon discovered that he was really enamoured of Lydia. She was too clever to set herself up openly as a rival. A man who is honestly in love is always on his guard

against patent coquetry. He is vain of his fidelity and quick to take alarm. She had no idea of exposing herself to the humiliation of avoidance even though it were a sign of weakness in him. Her power lay in presenting herself to him in a character radically different from Lydia's in which her beauty would shine upon him through the medium of friendship, a friendship that might gradually steal upon him, revealing itself at last as something more precious than he had dreamed. Yes, the only way to approach him was on his intellectual side. She had no fear of Lydia there.

She fully expected to be bored, now and then; but as she came to know Basil better, she was surprised to find that she wasn't bored at all. He introduced her to a novel set of ideas. It was interesting to hear him profess belief in principles of action which were flatly opposed to all Edgar Cheston had taught her. Unworldliness, from his point of view, was an estimable thing, not a matter for ridicule and avoidance. He really seemed to believe that morality was ordained of God, instead of being, as Edgar had so often explained to her, a mere code of rules invented by society to protect itself against predatory natures like their own. There was a kind of romance for her in his singularity. It seemed unreal, the creation of one's fancy, not a substantial thing for every day use. Nevertheless, she believed in him. What might be impossible for others seemed feasible for him. She could imagine him going to any lengths of suffering rather than yield to what he considered wrong. She was often reminded of certain high-flown, impossible characters, as they had seemed to her, in novels, and here was such a character in actual life. She doubted whether anyone who knew him perceived that he was an idealist. An "oddity," some people thought him—so Lydia had said—but they judged him merely from surface indications. He was usually so quiet, so practical, so matter of fact, that probably none suspected

that he had a strong vein of poetry in his nature—a poetry that exhibited itself to her in sudden flashes when he forgot himself in the glow of some eager expression of his more secret thoughts. She often felt a thrill of triumph when she had worked him up to this point. It was clear she had acquired the power of tempting him to reveal his inner nature to her, of overcoming his diffidence, of making him feel that he ran no risk with her of being thought queer.

But he *was* queer. Sometimes, he frightened her. There was no such thing as compromise with him in questions of conduct. He was really a bigot. She often found herself wishing he had not quite so high an opinion of her. Suppose, by any chance, he came to suspect her? In that case, would not his resentment be as extreme as was his mistaken confidence in her? She trembled at his unsparing condemnation of things of which she was especially guilty. She feared his judgment even more than the Rector's. The old man loved her; his nature was so gentle that he would instinctively seek to excuse her. Basil was so hardly truthful that he seemed to her likely to be pitiless in exacting veracity of others. Pshaw! He was but a man; how could he resist her? "If I am as fascinating as they say," she murmured to herself, "I shall, sooner or later, bring him to my feet. Once there, he won't mind having been deceived."

The game was more than merely amusing; it had begun to absorb her. She wished to win it, now, not to satisfy her vanity, but because she saw dimly shadowed forth a future that excited her ambition. The quality of power in Basil had grown upon her. It was power of which he seemed to be more or less unconscious, and evidently, did not know how to use. She often smiled as she watched him, thinking that, in some things, he was as simple as a child. He needed some one to form him, to bring him out, to put him in touch with influences that would temper his ideas

and give direction and purpose to his energies. What if she were to take him in hand? She knew the world, and it was this knowledge he seemed to lack. Why should she not supply it? Her beauty, her tact, her art in pleasing, her ability to penetrate the motives of average people, her freedom from the illusions which so often blinded him—what could be more useful to a man wrapped up, as he was, in all sorts of prejudices and wasting his faculties in idle speculation? Yes, she could make something of him; it would be pleasant to share his success. What mattered it if, in the meantime, he was humbugged for his own good? He would owe much to her; he would even have cause to be grateful to her for hiding her past from him.

Good Heavens! Did she care for him so much? Was she, who had felt herself secure in her indifference to men, in the grasp of a genuine attachment? Well—she did not know; she could not be sure. Undoubtedly, a new, a vital influence stirred her. Basil's future relation to her had become a matter of grave importance. As yet, he was friendly—very friendly—nothing more. She had never felt uncertainty of this kind before; men had invariably made love to her when she so willed it. And what would Edgar Cheston say when he returned from Washington and found her involved in such an affair? He had been compelled to give her a certain freedom in order that she might serve his ends, but she had reason to doubt whether he would consent to share her with another man. Suppose he proved stubborn—what then? He had but to convey a word or two to Basil to compromise her irretrievably. Well, she could ruin him, and she would. Yes, if he betrayed her, she would not hesitate to pull down the whole structure of their fraud about his ears. Of course, she would be crushed in the ruins but that were better than to be disgraced with Basil.

And now, she knew. She loved this man! She, the

scoffer at love; the gay comedienne who had so often played with passion, with careless lightness born of contempt; the heartless coquette who had used her beauty only to gratify her vanity and to fill Edgar Cheston's purse! She loved him because he believed in *her;* because he dignified her in her own thoughts, in spite of what she knew of herself, by his implicit confidence; because he showed her a deference, a respect no other man had ever shown her, with a touch of reverence as though she were some exalted creature far above him; but above all, because he was so unlike those others—so clean-minded, so honest, so true. Ah, if she were but worthy of him! Well—she might have been, had her life been differently shaped. She thought, with a sudden shiver of fear, of what she actually was. Could he ever forgive her if he knew? Even if she brought him to her feet, could she really reconcile him to her past? Was he capable of a passion that would sweep all before it—even his stubborn ideas of honour, his hatred of deceit, his absurd requirement of truthfulness in women? But to vanquish him in this way would be to degrade him, to rob him of the qualities that most appealed to her, to bring him down to her level. Ah, she loved him! He must be hers. There was no other course, if she was ever to hold him safe. Could she do it? Could any woman? He seemed so strong! How was she to satisfy herself on this point?

One afternoon, she obtained by chance the knowledge she coveted. She and Basil had been strolling in the garden at the Manor, and had sat down on a bench near the gateway at the lower end. In front of them was a rustic bridge spanning a tiny stream, the railings overgrown with honeysuckle and climbing roses. To the right, rose a bit of brick wall, old and broken, on which a lizard was lying asleep in the sun. A slight breeze caused a thick clump of canes a few rods away to bend and nod gracefully, and wafted sweet

odours from a group of tall young locust trees whose foliage was dappled with waving clusters of snowy blossoms. The fickle, variable beauty of early spring, its alternating fits of chilliness and warmth, like the moods of a coquettish girl, had gone, and all its tender promises were now redeemed in the maturer loveliness of a full unfolding of leaf and flower.

They had been discussing a great masterpiece of fiction which told the story of a man's infatuation for a beautiful but fickle woman for whose sake he repeatedly commits disgraceful actions. Basil admitted the possibility of such a passion, but claimed that, if the man had been strong, he would have combated it the moment it brought him face to face with dishonour. He might have failed again and again, but in the end, he would have won.

"Are you so sure of that?" said Judith incredulously, with a touch of impatience. "You don't know women!"

Basil glanced at her in surprise. She seemed almost angry with him. What had he said to offend her? Oh, well—no doubt she was a trifle irritated on behalf of her sex: she was rather inclined to assert its power. Perhaps, she was right. In some confusion, he remembered his ignominious collapse when Lydia had unconsciously tempted him. But that was different. No question of disgrace had been involved; Lydia could never have led him to dishonour.

"I admit my ignorance," he said, smiling. "But I can't imagine a man, who is really worthy of the name, succumbing to a woman, however charming, if he cannot respect her. Of course, I can only speak for myself: if such a passion possessed me, I think I could pluck it out."

There was a gleam of mockery in Judith's eyes. He only thought so! She had noticed he had hesitated before replying. Could it be that he had had some experience that made him doubtful? At that moment, Lydia passed close to

them on her way to the house from the barn. She had seen them, from a distance, but hurried on, without greeting them or looking round. Basil had only a brief glimpse of her as she disappeared behind a hedge, but in that glimpse, Judith surprised a look in his eyes that told her all. She had seen the same look in other men's eyes, and knew what it meant. He was weak as water with this girl! He had thought of *her* when he had hesitated. He had felt he might not be able to resist her. Yes, there was a flaw in the armour of his conceit, and Judith thought she knew how to reach it.

If Lydia could gain such power over him, it ought not to be difficult for her. What was Lydia but a pretty, wilful, unformed girl, while she—— Of course, his feeling for Lydia, however strong it might be, could be but evanescent. He was charmed by her wildness, her grace, her piquant beauty, but it was absurd to suppose that he would not weary of her ignorance, her caprices, her incapacity to share his more serious thoughts, to give him the kind of sympathy which she, Judith, was giving him, which was plainly becoming more and more grateful to him. She even felt like thanking Lydia. Had she not been the means of proving to her that Basil was weak precisely as she wished him to be? Now that she was sure of this, she could go forward resolutely. The issue could not be doubtful as between Lydia and her, even if Lydia were not indifferent. Let Lydia be ever so clever, she had not her experience, her fertility of expedient, the subtlety she had learned in a school of intrigue, of stratagem, of searching analysis of the weaknesses of men. "He shall prefer me to that chit!" she said to herself, with an insolent sense of power.

Lydia had been tempted to pause on seeing Judith and Basil, but something in their manner caused her to change her mind. They seemed strangely absorbed. She moved on towards the house, with a strong feeling of disquiet.

Could it be that they were closer friends than she had imagined? The idea annoyed her. Yet why should she care? Ought she not, in fact, to be glad? She had told Judith that Basil "bothered" her, and she had been quite sincere—at the time. But she hadn't expected this. It was one thing to be relieved, now and then, of an affection that was inconvenient, that put forth embarrassing claims; it was quite another thing—a thing she did not relish—to face the possibility of Judith's substitution for herself as the object of Basil's exclusive devotion. The sudden sight of them, in a moment of what seemed to be peculiar intimacy, caused her to feel that she had been summarily set aside. What was she to think of Basil's ardent professions? He had boasted of a love for her that would stand any test, yet now—— And she had hinted to Judith that he cared a good deal! Her cheeks burned at the thought.

Oswald Reeve, who was now a regular visitor at the Manor, happened to make his appearance that afternoon. Lydia received him with a cordiality that was almost effusive. He was the more welcome because Judith and Basil were in the parlor, conversing together with the same hateful air of intimacy. She talked to Oswald with feverish animation. It was consoling to be able to show Basil there was some one—even if he *were* Reeve's son—who still found her interesting. As for Judith, the dear cousin whom she had thought so charming—well, she could conceive the possibility of an active dislike of her, if she really meant to monopolise Basil.

CHAPTER XX

Lydia grew more and more restless as time wore on, and Basil, apparently, continued to be preoccupied with Judith. The worst of it was she couldn't be quite sure he really preferred Judith. Now and then, he would look at her or speak in a way that made her fancy he might still care for her. The uncertainty was very trying. If he and Judith loved each other, why didn't they say so? There was no reason for secrecy that she could see. It would be such a relief to know it was all over and settled. She would not admit to herself it was any special concern of hers, and yet, she felt cross, dissatisfied, almost unhappy.

Her sense of irritation became acute during a sailing expedition down the river which the Colonel had organised as one of several entertainments in honor of his niece. It was a bright May morning, and when the start was made from the wharf in the cove, some twenty boats were in line, with the Colonel's canoe in the lead. There was a fresh breeze wafting the fragrant scent of wild-grape blossoms from the high wooded banks of the opposite shore. The surface of the cove was but slightly ruffled, but when its mouth was reached, the river showed an angry face. White-caps were breaking in all directions, and sea-gulls flitted hither and thither like flakes of foam tossed up from the surf. The saucy little canoes plunged bravely into the surging waters and sped gaily on under shortened sail.

Judith was in the Colonel's boat. She sat in the stern near the tiller with Basil who was steering. Lydia was in the bow of the next canoe with Oswald Reeve. Judith and Basil were almost under her eyes as the one canoe followed

close in the wake of the other. She watched them anxiously, with an uneasy sense of expectation, and found it hard work to keep up a lively conversation with Oswald. Judith and Basil chatted pleasantly together; to Lydia's sharpened perception, they seemed to be having a provokingly good time. Basil never once looked round at her. After awhile, she heard Judith say,

"I would like to learn how to steer, Mr. Kent. It seems easy. Won't you teach me?"

"Why, of course," said Basil, promptly. "But it isn't so very easy to manage a canoe," he added, laughing.

As briefly as he could, he explained the mysteries of sail and centreboard and tiller, and then proceeded to give her a practical lesson by guiding her hand to the right place on the helm and showing her how to work it. Judith seemed to find the trial difficult. She made so many mistakes that Basil was kept busy seizing the tiller, and with it her hand, to hold the canoe reasonably true to its course. It seemed to Lydia that he did this oftener than was really necessary, and once, when his hand remained, clasping Judith's much longer than usual, an angry flush dyed her cheeks. Yielding to a hasty impulse, she cried out sharply,

"Be careful, Basil; you'll upset the boat!"

Basil did not heed her. Her warning was, in fact, superfluous: there was not the slightest danger, and he would only have laughed at her. But as it happened, he had not heard her. Judith caught the words distinctly enough, and glanced at Basil. He gave no sign, and her heart beat more quickly. Had she succeeded so soon in making him deaf to Lydia's voice, or at least, inattentive? It really seemed so. Lydia, herself, had no doubt at all on the subject. "He has ears and eyes only for Judith, now," she said to herself, with a keen sense of mortification. Turning to Oswald, she began to talk volubly. *He* was not indifferent. Far from

it. He listened eagerly, rejoicing in what he naturally construed as something more than mere friendliness.

An hour's run brought the boats to a small island on which stood a serried growth of tall, straight pines. Here, the party disembarked for luncheon. While awaiting the roasting of oysters and other preparations, the company broke up into groups and strolled along the beach or through the miniature forest, thickly strewn with pine cones and needles, with here and there a ragged stretch of coarse marsh grass and myrtle bushes.

Lydia's face clouded when she saw Basil set out with Judith. Without a word of apology, she turned abruptly from Oswald, and hurried off to her father. The Colonel was busy giving orders to a group of negroes about building a fire. "Aunt Dinah" stood near at hand, waiting to roast a heap of oysters that had just been taken from the water. With her head thrown back and her arms akimbo, she was staring mutinously at "Marse Jose," as Mr. Josias Plunkett was called by the negroes, who had just given her minute instructions on the subject. "Marse Jose" was a fastidious epicure and considered himself an expert in cookery. He had long been Dinah's pet aversion, because of his propensity for meddling in "de kitchen." As if he could teach *her* anything! She sniffed at him now, contemptuously, and but for "Ole Marster's" presence, would have voiced her temper in language objurgatory and by no means choice. As it was, she contented herself with muttering "Dat man's a pes'. Phayroah's plagues kain't hold a candle ter him. Some day, I'll pin a dishcloth to his coat-tails—I boun' I will!"

Oswald was disconcerted at first by Lydia's sudden desertion of him. Had he offended her? He could think of nothing he had done. Besides, she would have taken issue with him on the spot. She was too frank and outspoken to

hide her displeasure. Most probably, something had suddenly attracted her attention, and she had left him hastily, without thinking to excuse herself. He was convinced that this was the true explanation when, a moment later, she rejoined him and proposed, with an unembarrassed air, that they take a stroll up the beach.

The fact was that, at the moment, he was little more than a convenient makeshift to her. Her thoughts were busy with Judith and Basil. What were they saying to each other, as they wandered, yonder, through the hidden depths of the wood? The episode in the canoe had brought sharply home to her the idea that Basil *did* love her cousin. Perhaps, he was telling her so! She lent an inattentive ear to Oswald who exerted himself industriously to entertain her. Unconsciously, she had encouraged Oswald, of late, to fancy that his father's notion that she might learn to care for him in spite of his social disadvantages was not so improbable as it had seemed. He was the more inclined to interpret her increasing cordiality towards him in this light because of his deepening interest in her. The charm she had exerted from the first grew stronger and stronger with their growing intimacy. He had fully made up his mind by this time that she *was* beautiful—very beautiful—with a fascination that defied analysis, and for that reason, perhaps, allured him the more. He did not hesitate to admit to himself that he was in love. It was the first time, in a long series of affairs, that he had been quite sure. He had never been able to reconcile himself to the thought of devoting himself to any one woman—there were so many who were charming. But with Lydia, it seemed to him, he could be content.

A blast from a huge tin horn, blown with great energy by Dinah, summoned the wanderers to luncheon. A cloth had been spread on a bit of greensward in the shade of the pines.

The guests seated themselves about it, and the meal began amid a lively hum of voices. An eagle, poised high in air above the spot, watched the proceedings with some curiosity, no doubt, as to the meaning of so unaccustomed a scene on the lonely little island which scarcely ever knew any human occupant save an occasional fisherman.

The oysters proved to have been roasted "just right," and many expressions of commendation were heard among the guests. "Marse Jose" beamed with satisfaction, and several times glanced complacently at the Colonel as though to say, "It's all my work; what would you do without me, I wonder!"

The Colonel had never been in a brighter, more jovial humour. He was, indeed, as usually happened on such occasions, the life and soul of the feast. For each of his guests, he had a pleasant word or two which seemed to have a special appropriateness and value. His choicest jokes and stories were produced in due succession, and he was always on the alert to help any one who seemed at a loss in expressing an idea with the words that were needed; or, if it were a desperate case, with a quotation, more or less pertinent but always stimulating and reassuring, from one of his favourite poets.

It had been the fashion in the Colonel's youth for young gentlemen to commit verses to memory in order to be able to touch a sentimental chord in the breast of some captivating fair one at critical stages of a flirtation. Poetry was part of the social equipment of every well-bred young planter, and the Colonel had amassed quite a store of extracts from Pope, Moore, Byron and others which now did duty in almost every conceivable situation. It was really a privilege to see the Colonel, with his hand on his heart, in the act of reciting in sonorous voice and with great impressiveness to an abashed but highly flattered young lady, or perhaps, a withered but

still romantic old maid—he was quite impartial in distributing his attentions—some couplet from "Lalla Rookh" or "Don Juan."

After the luncheon, an hour or two was spent in talking, card-playing and flirting in the shady nooks of the wood. The company then re-embarked, and the boats started again towards the mouth of the river. The wind was still favourable and somewhat stronger, and the little vessels, with their spread of canvas apparently out of all proportion to their size, sped on at a brisker gait, dipping gracefully, now and then, until their sails almost touched the water. The sweet notes of a guitar, accompanying an old-fashioned air from one of the boats, or the rich roll of a stirring chorus blended not inharmoniously with the low humming of the wind through the rigging and the swish of the water against the sharp prows as they clove it, whirling long lines of foam to each side.

It was nearly sunset when the outlet to the bay was reached. As the canoes swung round, in obedience to the Colonel's order to put about, they faced a broad expanse of water, bounded apparently by a curving line of green shore, which seemed a lake of molten silver streaked with jets of flame from the sunset blaze. The wind had fallen; there was only a gentle swell from the bay, and the heaving bosom of the river showed a variety of tints like those of shot silk—from ruddy rose to lilac-gray. A fleet of oyster vessels, a mile or more away, had hoisted lights which twinkled like fireflies in a soft blue haze.

As the wind was now dead ahead, the canoes were forced to take long tacks, and their progress was slow. But no one complained. Even Mr. Plunkett, impatient to get back to the Manor for his evening pipe and game of chess, was soothed into a more or less grudging acquiescence by the soft, gliding motion through a balmy atmosphere radiant with

the magic beauty of sky and water at the close of a cloudless day. At a bend in the river, a ruined windmill on a distant bluff loomed suddenly forth against the sky, its crumbling tower and great, blackened yards thrown into sharp relief by a brilliant background of crimson and gold. At the base of the bluff, groups of cattle stood knee-deep in water or cropped the succulent marsh grass along the shore. A little farther on, the canoes glided like phantoms past a gloomy hollow shaded by a grove of rugged oaks which seemed to brood in sympathy with the melancholy of the spot.

The moon had risen when the party reached the Manor. Its amber light flooded the open spaces of the garden and cast its sheltered recesses into denser shade. The old house twinkled at every window with lights, and the merry notes of a fiddle greeted the returning guests with the strains of a jig. The young people instinctively quickened their steps, and on their arrival at the house, did but scant justice to the bountiful supper that awaited them, so eager were they for the dance. The parlours had been thrown into one and lit up brilliantly with wax candles in sconces on the walls. The floor had been scrubbed and polished until it shone like a mirror.

The Colonel opened the ball by leading out Judith. Ole Miss followed next with Basil, her dark eyes shining with genuine enjoyment. It was her habit always to dance the first quadrille, and to remain throughout the festivities, keeping a watchful eye upon the proprieties as well as upon the social exigencies of the occasion. There was no need of chaperones with her at hand, and many a "wall-flower" was grateful to her for harpooning a partner at a critical moment. As for the young men, they were always ready to do her bidding—not because they liked it, but because it had become second nature to them. They had been brought up in the fear of Ole Miss, and disobedience would have seemed

to them a kind of social enormity. The giddiest damsel was more or less in awe of her, and the boldest flirtations withered swiftly under her gaze.

Oswald Reeve succeeded in anticipating half a dozen young fellows who pressed forward eagerly to secure Lydia for the dance, and bore her off, with a glow of triumph, to their place in the set. She might have preferred some one else, he argued, had she chosen; it would have been easy for her to find an excuse. It was clear she was not unwilling to distinguish him thus publicly at a gathering of people of her own class. He was not alone in this opinion. Basil shared it, and the discomfited applicants grumbled among themselves at Lydia's strange failure, as it seemed to them, to recognise the superiority of their claims over even the prior invitation of "old Reeve's" son. The fellow was getting above himself. True; he had the Colonel's endorsement, but he ought to know enough to keep his distance.

Oswald soon perceived the hostility he had excited, and set to work cautiously to allay it. It would not do to make enemies unnecessarily. He had had his moment of success, and it had been very pleasant: he could afford to pay for it with little courtesies which might go far towards strengthening his position. For the greater part of the evening, he devoted himself industriously to the young ladies who were least sought after. Their mothers watched him with approving eyes, and finally, pronounced judicially among themselves in his favour.

"Who would ever have imagined him to be Reeve's son?" asked a haughty dame with four homely daughters whom Oswald had led out, one after the other, for a dance. "His manners are perfect. After all, his mother was a Frisby!"

From the lawn outside, a group of negroes watched the

scene indoors, their woolly heads clustered about the open windows. It was one of their cherished privileges thus to look on at a dance and comment, not always inaudibly, upon the appearance of this or that individual or the various episodes that excited their interest.

"Hit takes Ole Marster ter fling er foot!" exclaimed Aunt Sukey who had been a famous dancer in her youth and was regarded as an authority on the subject. She made the assertion in an oracular tone while the Colonel, with the quaint flourishes of the old school, was executing an elaborate *pas seul* before his partner, preparatory to "turning corners."

"Dat hit do, Aunt Suke," assented a young negro beau who, however, affected a more modern style, "he monst'ous limber, Ole Marster is, en' no mistake. But dat kind er dancin's too old-timey. People don't fling dereselves roun' regardlus now-er-days. Look at Marse Turlo, dah, steppin' so nice en' easy en' quiet—he's in de fashun."

"Marse Turlo!" cried Aunt Sukey contemptuously. "Go 'long, boy! I don't call dat rale dancin'; hit's only jes' walkin' roun'."

The negro fiddlers presently struck up a livelier tune—a tune with which all the dusky spectators were familiar. One of the latter, intoxicated by the seductive strains, began to pat juba and to sing softly in accompaniment to the violins. By degrees, the whole assemblage yielded to the infection. A subdued hum, a rhythmic swaying of their bodies testified to keen enjoyment of the melody. It was the nearest approach to actual participation in the merriment within which they might venture to permit themselves.

Basil Kent kept aloof from Lydia. Her manner towards him, since their return, had been markedly cool and distant. She seemed to be in high spirits, and he thought sadly that his presence at her side would only serve to cast a damper

upon her. He continued, therefore, to devote himself to Judith whom he rescued several times from the assiduities —very tiresome to her—of Turlo Cheston. Towards the close of the evening, however, Basil went up to Lydia and asked her for the next dance. He fancied she could scarcely refuse him one dance, if only for old friendship's sake.

Lydia drew back with a hostile air.

"All my dances were engaged long ago," she said, stiffly.

Basil turned from her hastily. It was evident she meant to repulse him; perhaps, to break with him definitely. He was not to be permitted to approach her, even as a friend. Why? Her manner towards Oswald seemed to furnish an almost explicit answer. Oswald loved her—that was clear; very probably she was interested in him. Whatever her feeling for Oswald might be, it was at least of such a nature as to exclude him, Basil, from her favour. How could he guess that she was piqued and seeking to punish him for his tardiness? It would have seemed to him absurd that she could be jealous of Judith. They were merely friends. He was utterly unconscious that another meaning might be attached to their evident intimacy. His love for Lydia was so supreme a fact to him—a fact he had made so plain to her and had not concealed from Judith —that the idea of being suspected of infidelity had not occurred to him for a moment. Besides, he was used to being believed, and Lydia, of all others, could never doubt his word. Almost any other man would have seen his danger; he knew so little of women that he felt perfectly safe. Instinctively, he drifted again to Judith who brightened at his approach. He felt that she was sure to be kind to him. He craved her sympathy; there is no consolation sweeter to a man rebuffed by one woman, than the tender graciousness of another—especially if she happen to be charming.

There was a suspicious moisture in Lydia's eyes as they followed him; they were quivering with unshed tears.

"How quick he was to go back to Judith!" she said to herself, indignantly. "Of course, he asked me only because he thought he must. If he had really wanted it, he wouldn't have taken 'no,' but would have begged me a little!"

CHAPTER XXI

When Lydia awoke next morning after a restless night, she was vaguely conscious of impending trouble. She felt a strange disinclination to get up, and was strongly tempted to turn over in bed in the hope of going to sleep again. What it was she had to face, she could not imagine, but she shrank instinctively from beginning the day. Usually, when she awoke, it was from the dreamless slumber of vigorous youth, with an eager desire to be up and doing. Surely, life at the Manor had not lost its charm. Of course not; she was merely tired from dancing late into the night. The sun had risen; the rest of the household were astir; she must not loiter. With a sudden effort, she raised herself on one elbow, thrust a small white foot out from the bedclothes, and then fell back, irresolute, on her pillow.

Her head ached. She was even more tired than she had thought. What a bother it would be to dress, even though she had Chloë, her maid, to help her. She flung back the tresses which had fallen in disorder about her warmly flushed cheeks with a gesture of impatience at the thought of Chloë. She did not want her; her presence would only annoy her; she wished to be alone. Ordinarily, Chloë was most welcome, for Lydia liked her to wait upon her, but to-day, she was actually quivering with repugnance at the thought of her intrusion. Chloë was sure to discover there was something wrong with her. Perhaps, she would conceive some odious idea. Lydia was half inclined to lock the door against her, but before she could reach a decision, Chloë tapped lightly, and without waiting for permission, entered the room.

Chloë was a pretty quadroon, slight and graceful, with del-

icate features, large, sloe-black eyes, a laughing mouth, and a pure olive complexion warmly flushed with rose. She had a shy, startled air that reminded one of some wild creature. She had been Lydia's special attendant since their earliest childhood, and was passionately fond of Young Miss. There was a strong bond of sympathy between them in their impatience of control and their common love of the woods, the open air, the space and freedom of the fields which, in Chloë, took the form of a passion for running off now and then and wandering at will. The girl was known among the slaves as " Runaway Chloë " from this propensity, which had doubtless been inherited, her mother and grandmother having exhibited the same trait which nothing could subdue. It was not an uncommon trait among the negroes, and was often distinctly marked in certain families. It did not seem to be due so much to a desire to escape from bondage permanently—for it rarely happened that this particular class of runaways continued their flight for any great distance—as to an uncontrollable thirst for temporary freedom and the lawless life of the woods. It was often the case, as with Chloë, that the fugitives fled from those they loved best. Chloë, for example, was never so happy as when with Young Miss, and yet, when the " fit," as the negroes called it, came upon her, she forgot Young Miss completely, and was off, in a flash, to the woods. As far back as she could remember, Lydia had imagined she understood her, and had sympathised with her. As a tiny child, she had braved her grandmother's wrath one day by releasing Chloë from a closet in which Ole Miss had confined her in punishment for running off, and ever after that, the grateful girl had been her willing slave.

On entering the room, Chloë greeted Young Miss brightly, and set at once about the preparations for her morning task. The question was decided for her, Lydia said to herself—

she *must* get up. Springing out of bed, she hastened into an adjoining room, where Chloë had made ready her customary morning bath. The bath refreshed her; she returned to Chloë, bright and smiling. But, as the girl flitted about her, deft and noiseless, she began to grow nervous and irritable. Chloë annoyed her inexpressibly. Lydia bit her lip with vexation, and tears started to her eyes. It was only by a great effort that she compelled herself to sit down and submit to Chloë's light, skilful touch as she combed and arranged her hair. Until now, she had always enjoyed this process, which affected her with a drowsy sense of comfort, but this morning, it seemed as if every muscle of her body tingled with impatience.

Chloë lingered lovingly over her work. There was nothing she liked so well as to "fix" Young Miss's hair. It was such beautiful hair—so long, so thick, so fine, so rich in colour. Lydia was seated near a window. A sunbeam, stealing through the half-open shutter and touching the wavy coil which Chloë was building up on the proudly poised head with infinite care, imparted to it a warm, luminous tint. Chloë uttered a soft sigh of admiration. She glanced down at the lovely face, and a tender smile lit up her own charming countenance. Her touch became, unconsciously, even softer, more caressing. Young Miss was so beautiful! Chloë's heart swelled with jealous love and pride. "No man is good enough for her," she murmured beneath her breath. A little wren hopped in at the open window from his bower in a climbing rose that reached the eaves, and perching himself on the sill, looked on at the scene with the wisely critical but appreciative air of a connoisseur inspecting a masterpiece. Chloë nodded at him gaily as though to say, "You admire her, too; you are a gentleman of taste, my little man!"

To Chloë's amazement, Young Miss suddenly sprang to

her feet and pushed her away almost roughly, crying in a vehement tone, "I can stand this no longer; you worry me, Chloë. Leave me—leave me, I say, this instant."

Bewildered at having been repulsed so rudely at the very moment when her heart was overflowing with love for her mistress, Chloë bowed her head humbly and without a word, left the room. Outside the door, she burst into tears. What could have come over Young Miss? She had never known her to act so strangely.

Lydia was quite as much perplexed. She knew she was capricious, unreasonable, out of sorts, but why? Was she ill? Absurd! What, then, was the matter? She looked at herself gravely in the glass, as if to find an answer in her face, and was startled by its look of pain. She was suffering from something that was obscure yet poignant; something that lay hidden deep within her, that seemed to be gripping her very heart. What could it be? It was Basil! The discovery flashed upon her suddenly, and with it, came the vivid sense of her impressions of the previous day and night. Even his old affection for her seemed dead. A few weeks ago, she would merely have been sorry. Of course, it would have been a great grief to her, but not *this* pain. Was it because of a foolish jealousy of Judith, or something more? She looked hastily away from the mirror, dreading the gaze of her own eyes. Ashamed of her weakness, she told herself, angrily, she would cease to think of him. The effort actually changed the current of her thoughts for the moment to Chloë. She had been very rough with her. The poor girl loved her, and she had driven her from her. No doubt, she was suffering cruelly. She must find her at once and beg her to forgive her.

Without waiting to complete her toilette, Lydia started off instantly in search of Chloë. She was not to be found in the house or the kitchen. Dinah informed her she

had gone towards the dairy. Lydia hurriedly crossed the kitchen yard and descended a rude stairway of stones to the bottom of a ravine through which ran a tiny stream. This fed the dairy, a small brick building with a paved area in front, in one corner of which was a spring bricked up from the bottom. On a three-legged stool beside the spring, sat Cynthy, the dairy woman, smoking a corn-cob pipe, which she instantly hid, at sight of Young Miss, in the ample folds of her striped cotton gown. Cynthy was an inveterate smoker in secret, but she was ashamed of the habit, and would never permit herself to be caught in the act by any of the "fam'ly, " if she could help it.

Lydia nodded a curt good-morning in reponse to her salaam, and hurrying into the dairy, found Chloë busy printing butter. With her sleeves rolled up, displaying a pair of shapely, dimpled arms, she was in the act of patting a ladle-full of butter into proper shape on the wooden print which bore the Manor emblem—a sheaf of wheat.

Lydia's sudden entrance startled Chloë. The latter imagined Young Miss was still angry with her, and had followed her with some unfriendly intention. Lydia's evident excitement helped to strengthen Chloë's conviction. In her distress and agitation, she let the butter print and paddle fall to the floor, and clasped her hands with a gesture of appeal.

"I didn't mean to be awk'ard, little Mistus," she exclaimed, imploringly. "Don't scold me no mo'; I can't bear it from *you*."

"I haven't come to scold you, you goose, but to ask your pardon," said Lydia quickly. She was anxious to get through with her task as soon as possible. It was anything but pleasant. She hated to apologise to any one, and Chloë was her maid. There was the pride of race as well as of class underlying her repugnance. She was a faulty

young creature at best, and of all her defects, her pride which had no real vanity in it, was perhaps the most deeply rooted, the most ebullient. Her look was almost fierce, and Chloë grew really frightened. There was no telling what Young Miss mightn't do.

"Well," cried Lydia imperiously, with a stamp of her foot, "are you going to forgive me or not? Must I stand here all day?"

"If—if you really want me," stammered Chloë, "I'll do anything you say, little Mistus. But it ain't worth while axin' pardin uv *me*."

"But I do ask you!"

Chloë's face brightened; she was beginning to perceive that Lydia was repentant and meant what she said.

"I know'd you didn't mean to hurt me," she murmured, softly.

"Then you forgive me? Thank you, Chloë."

She turned sharply on her heel as she spoke, and hastened back to her room. She was in a kind of fever. Now that she had finished with Chloë, she fell to questioning herself again, and try as she would to banish him from her thoughts, she could not help reverting to the change in Basil. Perhaps, it was her own fault. It was barely possible she had discouraged him by her coldness. It might even be that she had driven him to seek sympathy of Judith. Could she call him back to her? There must be something left of the feeling he had professed that day at the spring. What if she made some slight advances? They had often had their little tiffs, and she had never hesitated to offer to "make up" when she felt herself to be in the wrong. It was different, now, and her pride rebelled at the thought of seeming to contend with Judith for him. And yet——

Well, it would do no harm to ask him to escort her to a fox hunt to which they were invited for the following day.

Acting on the impulse without much reflection, she sat down and penned him a hasty note. It was brief and rather cool. There was nothing in it, she argued, that committed her, and yet, if he accepted, there would be at least an opportunity for her to hint to him she was not really obdurate—provided he showed the least inclination to be friends again. It all depended on him. "He can't expect me to go down on my knees to him," she said, with a haughty toss of her head, half repenting her invitation.

Her note found Basil plunged in gloom. He had gone home disheartened. He might have known it; what was he compared with Oswald? He must face the reality he had dreaded. But when he read her summons, his spirits rose. She cared a little for him—still. Reflection soon sobered him. Lydia was generous; very probably, she felt some compunction for her harshness of the night before, and was seeking to atone for it. Doubtless, this was all. His modesty made him a stubborn pessimist; he could not have believed it possible that happiness was more nearly within his reach than it had ever been before.

The sun had just risen when he reached the Manor next morning. Lydia was on the front verandah, awaiting him. Her horse, Knight, had already been brought from the stable. He was standing at the edge of the verandah, ready for her to mount. Every now and then, he looked round at her eagerly, champing his bit, as if asking why they didn't start.

Lydia greeted Basil rather negligently; she was anxious not to show him too much favour. There was even a touch of hostility, Basil fancied, in her manner as she stood leaning, with careless grace, against one of the verandah pillars; her eyes gleamed threateningly from beneath the peaked vizor of her riding cap.

Basil helped her to mount, and they set off in a canter.

For several miles, they exchanged scarcely more than half a dozen words. Each laid the blame upon the other. "He doesn't care to talk to me," said Lydia to herself, bitterly. "He'd be glib enough with Judith." "If I were Oswald," thought Basil, "she would be rattling along gaily." The two were wholly at cross-purposes ; each was held in check by a growing conviction of the other's indifference. Instead of closing, the rift between them was widening through the very means Lydia had employed in the hope of winning Basil back to her. "I might have spared myself my pains," she said, beneath her breath, with an angry glance at him. His silence mortified her ; apparently, he hadn't the least desire to please her. It was clear to Basil, on the other hand, that her summons meant nothing more than a grudging effort to make amends.

Both of them felt relieved when they reached the rendezvous for the hunt—the residence, some five miles distant, of Captain Montgomery Bludsoe, a noted fox-hunter. Judith, attended by Turlo, had already arrived, and the party was now complete. Grouped together in the middle of the front lawn, the company awaited the word from the Captain who officiated, by common consent, as master of the hunt. The mounts were all blooded animals of famous hunting stock. A pack of hounds, held in leash by an old negro, were leaping and yelping joyously in anticipation of the sport.

Captain Bludsoe was a ruddy, grizzled old fellow of great stature and proportionate bulk. Seated on a raw-boned but powerful sorrel mare, he rode from point to point, giving orders in loud, curt tones to half a dozen negroes who were busy with the preparations for the start—examining bridles, tightening girths, testing stirrup straps so that there should be no mishaps to the riders during the hunt. The Captain's appearance and get-up were in keeping with the general aspect of his home—that is to say, decidedly batter-

ed and down at the heel. His dress was rough and careless ; his manners quite as much so except when he addressed a lady. Towards the fair sex, he was always clumsily deferential, and the oaths with which, even in their presence, he could not refrain from interlarding his remarks, were the choicest in his vocabulary.

The house in which he had kept bachelor's hall for at least half a century, was a dilapidated wooden structure, originally painted yellow, but now a dingy gray. The lawn was a dismal waste, overgrown with briars and weeds. The entire estate had a forlorn, uncared-for appearance, and the name the Captain had bestowed upon it—" Mount Misery " —seemed not inappropriate. In point of fact, however, there was no jollier, more hospitable establishment in the neighbourhood. The Captain kept open house for his friends, and the neglected condition of the place was due to his passionate absorption in the pleasures of the chase ; of cock-fighting, horse-racing, card-playing and kindred diversions. In his younger days, he had been a noted duellist, and even now, though verging upon seventy years of age, he would have " gone out " upon the smallest provocation.

The Captain at length gave the word, and hounds and horses started off together. On reaching a wood which skirted the edge of the cultivated land, the hounds scented a fox, and soon, the silent arches of the forest rang with their baying. The fox, hard pressed, abandoned the wood and made for the open towards the river where he had his earth in the face of a bluff. Following close behind him, his pursuers found themselves in one of the pasture fields of the Manor. Except for a fence, there was an unbroken stretch before them to the river bank. Basil and Oswald had now gone to the front, neck and neck, with Lydia not far behind. The rest of the party were some distance away, strung out for a quarter of a mile or more. Basil and

Oswald soon gained on Lydia who pulled in Knight, wishing to leave them the finish. It was a close race between them. First one, then the other was slightly ahead. Suddenly, the fence rose before them. It was a high worm fence with a deep ditch on the farther side. Instinctively, Oswald checked his horse; he took it for granted Basil would halt to remove a rail or two—the leap was too dangerous. But Basil's blood was up. The excitement of the chase had roused in him a spirit of recklessness against which he had been struggling ever since he had begun to fear that Lydia was learning to care for Oswald. It was foolish, of course, but he could not repress a fierce desire to beat Oswald. The fire that burned beneath his usually quiet demeanour burst forth in a flame. His face was alight with eagerness; his gray eyes gleamed. He took the leap without pausing, and landed safe on the other side. In a moment, he had left Oswald hopelessly behind.

Oswald fancied Lydia was still near at hand; he did not wish her to think him timid. What Basil had done, he could do. Putting spurs to his horse, he braced himself for the spring. The gallant brute responded grandly, but he had lost his momentum. His heels just failed to clear the top rail, and stumbling, he tumbled headlong into the ditch, breaking his neck and burying his rider beneath him.

Basil continued on his way, ignorant that Oswald had attempted to follow. He succeeded in capturing the fox and turned back in triumph yet somewhat ashamed of himself for having yielded to what he now felt to be a hasty impulse, a bit of rashness that might have resulted in disaster. On nearing the fence, he found the whole party assembled in a group about a figure lying prone on the grass. Greatly alarmed, he urged his tired horse into a gallop, and coming up, saw that the fallen rider was Oswald. One of the hunts-

men, a physician, was bending over him with a grave, anxious air.

"Two ribs broken," he said, "there seems, also, to be a serious fracture of the leg, and he may be hurt internally."

"Poor fellow!" murmured a low voice, almost at Basil's elbow. He looked round quickly, and saw Lydia gazing down at Oswald. She was very pale, and tears glistened in her eyes.

"She loves him!" Basil said to himself, with a groan.

CHAPTER XXII

When Oswald recovered consciousness, he found himself in one of the guest chambers at the Manor. The physician was at his bedside waiting to question him. Near by, stood the Colonel, his kindly face clouded; he feared the worst for his protégé. It was too bad so fine a young fellow should be smashed up in this way. But Oswald's answers to the surgeon's interrogatories were reassuring, and the Colonel's face brightened as the Doctor exclaimed,

"You have got off better than I hoped. With good luck and good nursing, you'll pull through all right."

"I can promise him good nursing," said the Colonel cheerily, "my mother's a famous hand at that, as you know, Doctor. We mean to keep you here," he added, with a nod to Oswald, "until you are strong enough for another hunt. But no more leaps like that."

Oswald flushed with pleasure. How delightful to be an invalid here—near Lydia all the time; the object, doubtless, of solicitous interest on her part, with many opportunities for seeing her alone! The accident was really a piece of luck. He could well afford a few broken bones in exchange for the rare good fortune of living for a month or more on terms of intimacy at the Manor.

Weeks passed, by no means tediously, with punctual ministrations by Ole Miss, frequent visits from the Colonel, Mr. Plunkett and Turlo, and a daily message of inquiry from Lydia. At last, Oswald grew strong enough to hobble about the house and grounds with the aid of a cane. Lydia, remembering his conduct on the steamer, devoted herself to him assiduously. Basil, who called frequently to assure

himself of Oswald's continued improvement, found in her untiring attentions strong confirmation of his fears. Judith encouraged his delusion. Her manner towards him was tenderly sympathetic, as though she wished to condole with him. To Lydia, she always spoke of Basil with a cool air of appropriation, as if he now belonged exclusively to her. Lydia was disheartened, and suffered from a keen sense of inferiority. It was not Judith's beauty, nor her charm of manner, nor even the tact with which she managed Basil that made her seem to Lydia so formidable. These were dangerous enough, to be sure, but they were weapons she might hope to parry. What troubled her most of all was the fact that Judith knew so much more than she did, and could talk to Basil of an infinite variety of things of which she, Lydia, had scarcely even heard. She was not only clever, but, to Lydia's mind, an adept in kinds of knowledge which, she fancied, would appeal most strongly to him. Basil had always been a good deal more studious than she liked; she had often teased him to leave a book. Of course, when he and Judith set off on one of their intellectual excursions together, he was in the seventh heaven! And *she* was left behind, smarting with a bitter sense of exclusion. What wonder Basil preferred Judith to her? How ignorant, how stupid she must seem to him, now!

"And yet, I don't think I am naturally a dunce," said the poor child to herself with a spark of her old pride which had greatly diminished of late.

With the hope of raising herself from so ignominious a state, she appealed to Miss Twiggs to assist her in a course of reading. Nothing could have been more agreeable to that conscientious person who was distressed at finding so little to do. At Lydia's suggestion, they began with Shakespeare's plays. She had noticed that Judith was very strong in Shakespeare. In the course of her education

as an actress, Judith had studied Shakespearian rôles, but Lydia, of course, had no suspicion of this fact.

Lydia found it terribly hard work at first. The narrative interested her deeply, but the definitions of words, the analyses of sentences to which Miss Twiggs held her relentlessly were so tedious. "I feel," she declared one day, "as if I were pulling a beautiful flower to pieces." There were times when the task became almost insupportable; when she could scarcely resist the impulse to fling down her book and start off for a gallop on Knight or a ramble in the fragrant woods. A bit of blue sky seen from her window, the song of a bird, the music of the wind in the trees—any one of a hundred sights and sounds inviting her forth—filled her with a wild longing to escape the self-imposed drudgery, but she always set her little teeth hard together and continued to peg away, doggedly bent on catching up with Judith—in Shakespeare, at least. But it was dreadfully tiresome and slow. Would she ever catch up?

Lydia's attentions greatly stimulated Oswald's hopes for a time. He discovered at last, however, that he had made little if any progress with her beyond a merely friendly relation. She continued to be most kind and solicitous of his comfort, reading or chatting with him under the trees by the hour and playing checkers, chess or backgammon with exemplary patience. Oswald found it delightful to be ministered to and amused by her, but her very friendliness, free from all embarrassment or reserve, acted as a check upon him. He began to fear that she thought of him only as a pleasant companion.

There was a change, too, in her manner that caused him serious uneasiness. The gay impetuousness, which had been so marked a characteristic of her bearing in the earlier days of their acquaintance, had vanished. She had become strangely gentle and subdued. At times, he even imagined

she was sad—she who had been so gay and laughter-loving —and once or twice, he was almost sure that her eyes were wet with tears. What had caused the change? An incident of the closing days of his stay supplied an unlooked-for answer to his question.

Oswald had some literary taste, of the dilettante kind, and was particularly fond of delving among old records and family papers. No occupation had a greater charm for him than that of building up, bit by bit, from material obtained in this way, a picture of the long-buried past. The Colonel, discovering his penchant, suggested that there might be much to interest him in the "lumber room" in the garret, where a quantity of old documents were stored. Oswald found the "lumber room" a fascinating spot, and fell into the habit of spending an hour or two there every day.

It was a very large room, covering nearly the entire floor space of the main building. The steeply slanting roof showed its rafters and the sheathing of shingles untouched by paint. The large dormer windows looked out upon a zigzag line of roofs, thickly coated with moss, and upon chimneys of various heights and dimensions. Huge locust trees waved their scraggy branches almost against the window panes, and Lombardy poplars reared their shining green leafage above the tallest of the chimneys. A circular window in the front gable commanded a view of the lane, with its avenue of elms; a square window, at the opposite end of the room, afforded glimpses of the garden, the Quarter, the overseer's house, with the cove in the distance.

Oswald seated himself one afternoon in an old armchair of colonial pattern, upholstered in faded red velvet, in one of the dormer recesses, and was soon absorbed in examining a package of letters which revealed a touching romance of the Cheston family during the Protestant Revolution of 1689. The floor in front of him was strewn with a great variety of

objects—bits of rare China; broken articles of furniture; old, worm-eaten books; piles of yellow title-deeds, mortgages, letters; heaps of laces, silks and velvets, the remains of clothing which had adorned the person of some beau or belle of the family in olden days. From rusty nails driven into one of the rafters, hung three suits of military uniform, each representing a period of army service. One of them was the scarlet and buff of the Maryland "macaronis" during the Revolution. Another was the militia colonel's regimentals worn by our Colonel's father, the Judge, in the War of 1812. The third, of much more modern pattern, was the dragoon suit which the Colonel himself had donned upon his promotion to a captaincy at the close of the last campaign against Osceola, the noted Seminole chief.

There was scarcely an object in the room which did not possess some interest for Oswald in the associations it suggested. The silks and velvets and laces, for example, called up vividly the scenes of colonial times—the stately minuets in the parlours downstairs; the formal water parties in large bateaux, propelled by negro oarsmen, which were also used in making visits of ceremony at neighbouring plantations; the foppish audiences in the tiny theatre of quaint old Annapolis, the provincial capital, which was visited frequently by strolling players; the groups of brilliant youths and maidens moving with slow, measured tread over the lawn or along the shady, fragrant paths of the garden. But the chief interest for him lay in the collection of letters, and as he slowly deciphered the faded characters which told the romance upon which he had stumbled, he was brought close in sympathy to the poor ghosts who, in the flesh, had traced the lines which had secured to them a chance resurrection. How plainly they were brought to life again by their unconscious disclosures! A single sentence, in some instances, presented an individuality with all its distinguishing traits—

its weaknesses, its faults, its prejudices, or perhaps, its worthy, lovable qualities—in clear outline. So real were some of the images, limned with a naïvely graphic power, that Oswald almost fancied he could see the originals before him. He drifted away into a state of abstraction, and at a slight noise in a distant part of the room, started nervously, as though a ghostly hand had touched him.

Glancing round, he beheld, not a ghost, but Lydia standing at the gable window which looked down upon the garden. Evidently, she had not seen him. Seated in the recess, he was concealed from anyone entering the room. Oswald rose, intending to make his presence known. As he did so, he was startled by a sob. He advanced towards her slowly, thinking to give her time to hide the traces of her tears. At the sound of his footsteps, Lydia turned hastily, making no effort to conceal the fact that she was weeping. In her eyes, there was a gleam of joy, as of sunshine struggling through a cloud. The moment she saw Oswald, the light died out of them, and she hung her head with a look of acute disappointment.

"Oh it is *you*, Mr. Reeve?" she murmured, scarcely knowing what she said, "I thought it was Basil."

Oswald halted abruptly, and stood gazing at her with a look of blank consternation. Her words, interpreting her sudden change of countenance, threw a vivid light on the situation. It was impossible for him to mistake their meaning. He knew, as well as if she had told him, that she would have welcomed Basil in a manner very different from her greeting to him. When she had looked around, it had been in the eager confidence that he was Basil: her evident disappointment was a crushing blow to his hopes. Why had she mistaken him for Basil? Could it be that she had expected to meet Basil here, and had burst into tears because he had failed to keep the appointment?

Oswald, of course, could not guess that Lydia had come to the "lumber room" merely because it was associated in her mind with pleasant memories of Basil. Here, as a child, she had spent many a happy hour with him, rummaging among the contents of the trunks or reading the old letters and weaving quaint fancies out of them. The very atmosphere of the garret recalled to her delightful impressions during the hours they had thus spent together. The close, musty, yet not unpleasant smell of the place; the sunbeams which fell athwart the rafters in golden shafts which sparkled with tiny particles of dust; the bees and wasps buzzing against the window panes; the swallows flitting about the chimneys outside—all helped to bring the past before her in a mellower light and to intensify the vague, undefinable romance of her associations with the spot. The feeling that, perhaps, it was all ended; that Basil was no longer a factor in her life; that he had ceased to take any interest in her, affected her with a keener sense of pain. A convulsive tremor shook her; her eyes were suddenly flooded with tears.

On hearing Oswald move from his post, her heart had throbbed wildly from the conviction that Basil must have followed her from the hall where she had left him talking with Judith. Why should he leave Judith and follow her, especially to this spot so dear to both of them once, if not to say something to her in which Judith had no part? Could it be that he still thought of her, after all? It was a rude awakening when she recognised Oswald, whose frequent visits to the "lumber room" she had quite forgotten. She stood with bowed head, ashamed of having shown her secret distress to him. She was spared the greater pain of knowing that he suspected its cause.

Oswald murmured some lame excuse, and hurried from the room. Evidently, she cared for Basil, but was her grief

due to love or merely to wounded affection and pique? Of course, she was jealous of Judith. Oswald had seen that clearly enough for some days. No doubt, that was the reason she had turned to him. What an idiot he had been! But not half such an idiot as Basil. What could the fellow be thinking of to spend so much of his time with Judith? He had watched him closely, hoping to find that he had lost his heart to her. Nothing of the kind; there was never a symptom of love. When Lydia came near him, passion leaped into his eyes. How simple of Basil to imagine that he and Judith could be such friends without exciting Lydia's resentment. And Judith herself—did he think he was going to escape from her unscathed? Oswald knew her type; she was sure to make things lively for Basil, some day. Perhaps, she had consciously irritated Lydia—women had a way of doing such things—and made her fancy she was more interested in Basil than she really was. Well, it was in his power to learn the state of her heart. He had but to force from Basil an avowal of the political opinions which his father attributed to him. That would be a conclusive test. If Lydia did not love him, she would break with him at once. If she did love him, she would condone his offence, for it would be a very grave offence in her eyes to array himself on the other side. Her political prejudices, as Oswald had learned, were as intense as his father had asserted, and when a woman's prejudices are silent, her passion speaks. In any event, he would discredit Basil with her family; if his father was not mistaken, he might make it impossible for her, even if she loved him, to have any further intercourse with him.

Yes, he must sacrifice Basil. There was no hope for him so long as she was free to indulge even her affection for her old companion. He must drive Basil wholly from the range of her sympathy, her interest. It was possible she would

then listen to him. He was as keenly conscious as at first of the meanness of such conduct towards the friend who was still kind to him, who of late, as formerly at college, had helped him socially; but had it been infamous instead of merely ungrateful and shabby, he would, perhaps, have persisted in it. He loved this girl with a passion that surprised him. All the artificialities of thought and feeling which he had cultivated so sedulously disappeared in her presence, and he felt the impulses only of the natural man. The coating of gentility had peeled off utterly; he stood revealed to himself as his father's son might be expected to be, a man to whom nothing—not gratitude, nor honour, nor even love itself—appealed so strongly as desire.

CHAPTER XXIII

Oswald's father was bitterly chagrined when he learned of the episode in the garret. He had been a daily visitor at the Manor since the accident, and of late, had grown very confident as to Lydia's feeling for Oswald. He often saw them together, and her manner towards Oswald seemed to the observant lawyer, skilled in reading human motives and impulses, to be distinctly encouraging. Even more significant, to his mind, was her treatment of himself. She was no longer cold and formal as she had always been, to his great annoyance, but friendly, kind and almost cordial, just as though she had come to regard him in the light of a probable father-in-law. He often exulted in the thought that he might soon be able to call the capricious little aristocrat, who held her head so high and yet could be so sweet and gracious, his daughter. What a triumph to be able to say to her, "My dear, I own the Manor; it is my wedding present to you and Oswald!" He had never been so hopeful of reaching his goal. The Colonel, as well as Lydia, was kind to him. His manner was no longer patronising; for the first time in their intercourse, he treated him as his equal. How could he guess that Oswald's misfortune had leveled distinctions for both the Colonel and his daughter; that they were considerate of him merely for his son's sake? It was a delight to him to be at the Manor, to look about him with the sense of coming proprietorship, to feel that he would soon be virtually master there.

At first, he insisted that Oswald must be mistaken; it wasn't possible Lydia preferred so dull a fellow as Basil.

When, at length, he was forced to yield to his son's reasoning and admit that there might be something in it, he began to feel vicious. Had she been trifling with him all this time? It was intolerable to think she might have been merely mocking him and laughing in her sleeve. And yet, it would be only what her class had always done. He had so often been their butt when they were not using him. He would show her his power! If she really cared for Basil, so much the worse for her. Unless his shrewdness was utterly at fault, he would raise a barrier between them which even love could not overstep. He would compromise Basil in the eyes of her family, of her friends, and even in her own eyes. His apostasy, as she would regard it, meant ineffable disgrace. It would make her love, if it existed, a cause of reproach and pain. She would never be able to think of Basil save with shame at her weakness.

A more urgent motive strengthened his purpose. It was of the first importance to him, pecuniarily, to prevent Basil from marrying the Colonel's daughter. If he became the Colonel's son-in-law, Basil would undoubtedly look closely into the Manor affairs, and that meant the discovery of the lawyer's long series of peculations. Exposure would not only render him liable for a large amount of money, but would ruin him in the community. Other doubtful transactions might be brought to light, and criminal proceedings, even, might be instituted against him. Breaches of trust, spoliation of widows and orphans, sharp practices on unsuspicious clients are things that may be covered up by success but are apt to crop out inconveniently when suspicion is once excited. Reeve had never thought of Basil as a possible obstacle in his designs upon the Manor; he had been accustomed to consider him harmless inasmuch as, during all these years, he had never caused him any trouble with the Colonel. He was a new element in his problem, and one

that must be eliminated at any cost. It was a matter of self-preservation, perhaps, to suppress him at once.

The opportunity only was lacking, and this was soon provided by a dinner which the Colonel gave to some of the officers of his battalion of militia. Thus far, the battalion had not played the part in the contest which, for nearly three months, had been raging between the North and the South, that the Colonel had hoped for. Tidewater Maryland was remote from the theatre of military operations; it was only along the Potomac that any glimpses of the struggle were obtained, and these were not of actual conflicts but merely of the movements of troops. The upland region of the State was destined to be the scene of sanguinary battle, but almost the whole of the Tidewater region remained undisturbed by more than the dull reverberation of war. Apart from all the excitement, the bustle, the fury of men in the death-grip of bloody combat on its borders, it preserved its characteristic quiet ruffled only by the alternating hopes and fears of those who were roused to active interest in the struggle. Men who shared the Colonel's prejudices and felt the flame of enthusiasm grew impatient. They could do nothing here; their hands were tied. The movement to take Maryland out of the Union had failed; every corner of the State was occupied by Northern troops. Why not go South and help their brethren there? Perhaps, if the Confederacy triumphed, Maryland might yet be torn from the stubborn grasp of the North. One by one, at first, and then in groups, the members of the battalion dropped out of its ranks, and made their way clandestinely across the Potomac. It was necessary to keep their destination secret in order to avoid arrest and perhaps long imprisonment by the Union authorities. From many points along the Chesapeake, surreptitious communication with the Confederate lines was maintained by means of craft professedly engaged in the

innocent occupation of fishing or carrying grain. There was an element of mystery and danger in "going South" which, of itself, attracted adventurous spirits. In a little while, the migration had become general, and at last, but a remnant of the Colonel's command was left. It was high time, in his opinion, to formally disband. A dinner to those of his officers who remained seemed to him the most practicable and fitting means of effecting this and wishing them all godspeed. It was no longer safe to hold open meetings; the whole battalion was the object of well-founded suspicion on the part of the "Yankee" commander of the neighbourhood who showed an unpleasant eagerness to nab Southern sympathisers.

The Colonel had meant to be among the first to leave. He had known Lee and "Joe" Johnston as cadets at West Point, and either of those generals would recommend him for a good command. But his affairs must be set in order, and when this was done to his satisfaction, he encountered the stubborn opposition of his wife. Mrs. Cheston went into a fit of hysterics when he broached the subject, and for some days, she lay desperately ill. When she recovered, she pleaded with him so pitifully not to leave her that the Colonel was at his wits' end. She gave him no peace until he promised not to go without her consent, and he was forced to see his battalion melt away while he remained inactive at home.

The dinner was one of the most ambitious entertainments that had ever been given at the Manor, and Aunt Dinah surpassed all previous achievements of her art as a cook. While waiting for dinner to be announced, the guests strolled about on the lawn or along the paths of the garden, or sat in the shade of the larger trees, sipping juleps and toddies and discussing the latest war news, the weather and the crops. On a table on the front verandah, stood a huge bowl of

whisky punch which Mr. Plunkett had mixed, and hospitably urged every one to taste, setting the example himself rather oftener than was judicious.

It was a delightful summer afternoon, cool and fresh, with a fine breeze from the river. The declining sun, glinting on the lichen-covered boles of the ancient elms and lindens, imparted to them a softness of texture like that of velvet. In a near-by field, the wheat was being reaped, and now and then, there broke in upon the hum of conversation on the lawn a mellow chant from the negro cradlers, some twenty in all, as, moving with even step, they swept the ripened grain with a single flash of their blades.

It was nearly sunset when the dinner began. The shutters of the dining-room had been closed, and the large apartment, wainscoted in oak, was lit up with candles in large candelabra of solid silver, said to be of Queen Anne's time, which were placed at intervals along the centre and at the four corners of the table. On the snowy damask, glittered a fine array of old India china, cut-glass and silver—the latter of many ancient patterns. Half a dozen negro urchins stood at certain distances apart, waving long brushes of peacock feathers to drive off flies. The major domo, Pompey, suave and deft, stood at the Colonel's elbow ready to respond in a moment to the slightest word or gesture of his master, keeping a close watch, all the while, on his staff of waiters.

The Colonel sat at one end of the table, Mr. Plunkett at the other. The latter might have been mistaken for the host, if conclusions were drawn from his manner, which was one of great dignity and self-importance. He flattered himself, indeed, that he did the honours on such occasions with much greater impressiveness and tact than his brother-in-law. The Colonel always submitted amiably to his petty usurpations. They seemed to afford him so much enjoyment

and detracted nothing, in the Colonel's opinion, from his own dignity. Everybody knew Josias.

The absence of monied distinctions in Tidewater society was strongly emphasised in the appearance of some of the Colonel's guests. With the exception of Reeve and his son, all of them belonged by right of birth to the plantation caste, but a stranger might have doubted their pretensions if he had judged them by the homely or threadbare garb of not a few members of the company. The most impecunious looking among them, however, exhibited an ease and self-confidence which stamped them unmistakably. There was a certain pathos in the critical air with which some of these, whose cellars had long been empty, passed judgment on the wine. As though used to sipping the choicest port or madeira every day, they would hold their glasses up to the light to examine the colour, or would inhale the fragrance slowly, to determine whether it had the right bouquet. A rubicund, white-moustached old gentleman, with impressive dignity of bearing, who ranked next to the Colonel in the county in social importance, conversed most affably, without a trace of condescension (condescension, indeed!) with "Headlong" Jack Frisby, who hadn't an acre that wasn't mortgaged for all it would carry; whose clothing was patched and darned in many places, and yet conducted himself with perfect sang-froid. Jack belonged to one of the "very first families," and this fact was never lost sight of or ignored by his neighbours merely because he happened to be poor. He was welcomed cordially at every entertainment, and not the proudest of his hosts ever dreamed of feeling compromised by his scarecrow appearance.

The Colonel, bland and courteous, kept up an easy conversation with his guests, with a watchful eye upon the mechanism of the dinner, even to the snuffing of the candles. This duty was discharged by Pompey, who, though provided

with a pair of brass extinguishers, preferred to use his fingers which were apparently fireproof.

Reeve had been included among the Colonel's guests, partly because of his activity and zeal as a Secessionist, but chiefly from the fact that he was Oswald's father. Though greatly flattered, he felt uncomfortable. He could see in the glances of some of the company that his presence was regarded as of doubtful propriety. The Colonel himself was by no means sure that he had acted up to his principles in inviting him, but he quieted his scruples with the reflection that the dinner was a semi-public affair which did not exact the nicest distinctions.

The lawyer bore up under what was, for him, a very hard trial, with sulky impassiveness, bent upon accomplishing the object he had in view. He had secured a seat next to Captain Bludsoe, with Basil opposite. He intended to use the choleric Captain as his catspaw. Oswald sat on the other side of Captain Bludsoe with whom he endeavoured to chat unconcernedly. Every now and then, he would steal a glance at Basil, flushing guiltily whenever he happened to meet his eye.

Reeve kept a decanter of wine or brandy constantly at Captain Bludsoe's elbow, and slily filled his glass more than once. The Captain was a seasoned toper, but owing to the lawyer's adroitness and persistence, he was beguiled into taking more than he regarded as a safe allowance. Towards the close of the dinner, he had become quite tipsy enough for Reeve's purpose. He had just swallowed a stiff dram of brandy when the lawyer said to him in a low voice,

"Did you know we had an Abolitionist among us?"

The Captain started as though something had pricked him. Wheeling round in his chair, he glared at Reeve with blood-shot eyes.

"An Abolitionist *here*," he muttered thickly, "nonsense, man—you must be dreaming!"

"Have you noticed young Kent?" demanded Reeve, nodding towards Basil. "He hasn't drunk a single toast."

"What does that signify?" said the Captain shortly. He liked Basil, and he did not like Reeve. "He's not a drinking man, sir. I will answer for him!"

His eyes questioned Reeve pugnaciously. Nothing would have pleased him better than a duel with the lawyer, against whom he had a grudge of long standing, growing out of certain pecuniary transactions, but of course the fellow wouldn't fight. How could it be expected of him when gentlemen no longer resorted to the code?

It was true that Basil had ignored all the toasts which, without exception, had been pronouncedly Secessionist. He was used to hearing such sentiments at the Colonel's dinner table, and accepted them as a matter of course. It was only of late that his convictions had taken shape, and it was with great reluctance that he had been forced to the conclusion that slavery was irreconcilable with the spirit of the age, a growing anachronism. Notwithstanding his decision of character, he had the faculty, inconvenient at times, of seeing two sides to a question, and his natural diffidence had caused him to feel that, perhaps, he was mistaken in having adopted views so radically at variance with those of all his friends. He was reassured, somewhat, by the knowledge that his father, a student and thinker, disapproved of slavery, but his mind had continued to be disturbed by doubts, and he had hesitated to express his dissent from the general opinion.

After all, it seemed to him, a good deal might be said in favour of slavery in its practical workings. There might be isolated cases of cruelty and oppression, but as a rule, the

negroes seemed light-hearted and happy. Was not their condition, upon the whole, much better than it would have been as roaming savages in Africa exposed to the tyranny of far worse forms of servitude or to the horrors of tribal wars, of tortures, of cannibalism? Had they not, in the mass, been gainers by the transfer of their forefathers to the heart of a civilised country? Were they not being gradually educated and raised to a higher level? Compulsion, from his observation of the negro character, was absolutely necessary to train them to habits of industry, sobriety and good order. It was the only kind of improvement for which, as yet, they were fitted as a race. Suppose the compulsion were removed? Would they not relapse into idleness and barbarism almost immediately? If emancipated suddenly, might they not drift into a state of antagonism to all law which would make them a dangerous element?

Basil's instincts and sympathies were largely those of his class. He could not think without pain of the destruction of the rural aristocracy which must follow the abolition of slavery. That aristocracy, with all its faults and follies, had undoubtedly diffused a disciplining and refining force. On the whole, it had showed itself disinterested and patriotic. With little to gain and much to lose by separation from England, whose authority in the colonies was most favourable to its permanence and growth, it had generously led in the struggle for colonial independence. Since the Revolution, it had been foremost in asserting the national dignity. From its ranks, the state and federal legislatures had been recruited with men of more or less culture and of reasonably liberal views, whose integrity was incorruptible. Abolish this aristocracy, and there would be substituted the coarser conditions of a rural society which had no fixed standard in the example of a superior class—the selfish greed of small land-owners; the competition of a thousand petty interests

struggling for supremacy; the domination of the ignorant farmer, the grasping merchant, the tricky lawyer. Basil shrank from such a prospect.

But the question at issue went deeper than this. It was, reduced to its simplest terms, a question of the rights of man. Freedom, to his mind, was the natural privilege of every human being. No considerations of mere expediency could justify holding one's fellow-creatures in bondage, or trading in human flesh and blood as one would trade in horses and cattle. The world had got beyond that. The conditions of modern progress might be destructive of much that was worth preserving, but they tended irresistibly towards a gentler humanity. Slavery was the one great obstacle in its path; the last stronghold, as it seemed to him, of despotic power.

Reeve was somewhat taken aback by Captain Bludsoe's incredulity, but he was not to be baffled.

"Have you ever heard him utter a word in favour of slavery or secession?" he demanded.

"It's absurd, I tell you!" growled the Captain. "You forget that Basil Kent belongs to one of our oldest families!"

Basil's social position was, in the Captain's eyes, conclusive evidence of his political orthodoxy. It seemed inconceivable, to the Captain, that a Southern gentleman could be an Abolitionist—in other words, a foe to the conditions on which his class depended for its existence.

"You may be right," said Reeve, with a confident smile, "but it is easy to settle the matter; just ask him to join you in a toast to the Southern cause."

"By God, I will!" spluttered the Captain, furious at the lawyer's pertinacity, which was all the more offensive to him because he resented having to touch elbows with such a common fellow. "Basil, lad," he called out across the table,

in a hoarse bellow that startled everybody, "I want you to drink a toast with me!"

Basil looked round in surprise. He saw at once that the Captain was intoxicated, and imagining his proposal to have been prompted by a mere tipsy whim, he decided to humour him. The Captain was apt to be obstreperous when inflamed with liquor, and Basil wanted to save the Colonel the annoyance of one of the old fire-eater's outbreaks.

"Why, certainly, Captain," he answered, in a pleasant tone. Filling his glass from the nearest decanter of sherry, he waited without the ghost of a suspicion of the mine that had been laid for him.

The Captain poured out half a tumblerful of brandy, and flourishing the glass, exclaimed,

"Success to the Confederacy, confusion to the Yankees!"

To the astonishment of everyone save Reeve and his son, Basil set down the glass he had raised to his lips, and said, "I cannot drink that toast."

CHAPTER XXIV

Basil was pale; his voice trembled. He was fully conscious of the gravity of his decision. The Captain's challenge had illuminated the situation for him. He had seen, in a flash, where his duty lay. The convictions which had been forming slowly for months leaped, all at once, into vigorous life. Now that he knew what he really thought and felt, evasion or concealment had become impossible for him—impossible because dishonest.

He had no illusions as to the consequences of his refusal. It was an act which cut asunder, at one stroke, all his dearest ties. It left him isolated, a general mark for hostility and contempt. Few, if any, would understand his motives. Even those who might give him credit for being sincere would regard him only as a foolish fanatic. He well knew the nature of the prejudices he must encounter. They were not unnatural prejudices, in his opinion. On the contrary, they were the ordinary, logical product of local conditions. Their very reasonableness, from the point of view of those who held them, made them all the more formidable. No one could be persuaded to admit that he, as one of themselves, could offer any justification for his course.

In a moment, a frost had fallen upon the company which, until now, had been thoroughly jovial. The faces gazing at him were either incredulous or angry. In the eyes of some, he read incipient scorn. From this assemblage, no indulgence might be expected; from its verdict, there could be no appeal. It was a representative gathering, and its opinion would be the general opinion. Every type of the dominating class was to be found in it, and every shade of

inherited prejudice was embodied in these different types. The student of heredity would have been interested in studying the various faces. They were individualised so strongly that it would have been possible to determine—at least, with plausible probability—the particular strain of ancestry which each represented. There were dignified old gentlemen with shaven faces of stern, ascetic cast, who might have descended from the Puritan Commissioners, Bennett and Lloyd. Side by side with them, in convivial intimacy, sat gaunt, sallow-visaged individuals, keen of eye, with the flowing locks and long, peaked beards of King Charles's cavaliers. The merry, roystering qualities of the Restoration squires showed themselves in the jolly, devil-may-care visages of reckless, fox-hunting youths like Turlo. The grim but not pleasure-hating characteristics of the sturdy yeoman stock which contributed the bulk of Lord Baltimore's colonists were visible in the coarser visages of half-a-dozen tough old chaps, like Captain Bludsoe, who sat sipping their wine or whisky and water with a deliberate, meditative enjoyment.

Basil comprehended perfectly what was passing in the minds of nearly all. Save Oswald and his father perhaps, there was not one of them who was capable of considering the question as even debatable. Oswald, having had the advantages of a liberal education and of travel, might be expected to take a broader view. The lawyer, free from the prejudices of caste, and at heart, resentfully opposed to them, might sympathise secretly, but ever ready to "trim," he would take care not to let his sympathy appear. All the others, even those most friendly to him—including, of course, the Colonel—would look upon him as a pervert from principles which were part of the religion of his section and his class. Even those who had doubts on the subject of slavery —and not a few of the planters inclined to some scheme of gradual emancipation—would be incensed against him for ad-

vocating immediate abolition, a thing abhorrent to the most liberal slaveholder as involving a sudden and ruinous sacrifice of so much of his vested capital, his property in slaves. As one man, they would cast him out. They were friends no longer, but enemies who would assail him at every point.

And Lydia! A sharp pang shot through him at the thought that he had done the one thing she would most bitterly resent, and must become for her, also, an object of dislike, perhaps of loathing. How could she fail to despise him, as others would despise him? Intensely prejudiced as she was in favour of her father's opinions, she would inevitably exchange her present feeling of indifference for one of active contempt. That were hard to bear. He had been striving, ever since the conviction that she loved Oswald had forced itself upon him at the fox-hunt, to accustom himself to the dreary fact that, henceforth, he could be nothing to her, but he recoiled from the thought of her scorn.

For a moment, his sense of duty and his inclination wrestled desperately for the mastery. He might even yet draw back and make some excuse for his refusal. It need not even be plausible ; his friends would be glad to welcome him again to the fold, however clumsily he recanted. A flush of shame followed his momentary weakness. He could not palter with the truth. If it broke his heart, he must not equivocate. He knew that if he failed now, he could never hold up his head again. That were worse than the loss of all he was risking. He might be able to bear the contempt of others—yes, even Lydia's—knowing it was unmerited ; he could not bear his own contempt—the secret knowledge of a moral cowardice that would always cling to him ; that would clutch his heart-strings with its slimy fangs whenever he thought of this moment, and poison every breath he drew. He could never escape the horrible thing, never ! Let come what would, he must save himself from

that. His brow cleared: his resolution was taken. He lifted his head, and a touch of colour shone in his cheeks.

"You must excuse me, Captain," he said in a strong, even tone, speaking slowly. "The Union our fathers fought for seems to me a sacred thing. Secession and slavery are both, in my opinion, morally wrong. Until now, my convictions have been more or less vague, but you forced the issue upon me; the fact that I had to meet it revealed to me my true state of mind. Believe me, I do not lightly oppose my views to those of all my friends; I would gladly have kept silent, but in refusing to drink your toast, I am compelled to explain."

No one spoke for some moments. Astonishment held every one dumb. Captain Bludsoe was the first to break the silence. Staring blankly at Basil, he sank back helplessly in his chair, muttering,

"That damned pettifogger wasn't lying. A gentleman turned Abolitionist? What the devil are we coming to? I have lived too long!"

The Colonel gazed at Basil with blended pain and compassion. He had suffered a cruel blow. Basil—the young fellow he had admired, had loved so fondly, whom he would have chosen of all others as the husband of his darling girl! He had known he was lax in some of his opinions, but this was out of all reason; it couldn't be. Springing from his seat, as Basil turned from the table, he seized him by the shoulder, and said, in a hurried whisper,

"Don't leave us in this way, my boy. You were nettled by old Bludsoe and didn't mean what you said. It's impossible, of course, that you, who are one of us, should be really an Abolitionist. If you will go, wait for me in the library where we may have a quiet talk. It won't take me long to clear your head."

"It is useless, Colonel," said Basil with a sigh, deeply

touched by his old friend's kindness. "My mind is made up. The lines have been drawn; I must take one side or the other; it is impossible for me to remain neutral. You, of all men, would never advise me to trifle with my convictions. Would to Heaven I *could* be persuaded, but discussion would only be painful for both of us. Try to think of me kindly. I am leaving what I most love and value. Good-bye."

The Colonel wrung his hand, and turned from him with a look of acute distress. "The boy is mad—mad!" he exclaimed.

As Basil hurried from the room, Reeve leaned over, behind Captain Bludsoe's chair, and whispered to Oswald,

"Well, what did I tell you? Basil Kent will never darken these doors again."

Oswald did not reply. He hated his father at that moment, himself even more. But he did not repent what had been done at his instigation; he had got rid of his only rival; the way was clear.

In the hall, Basil encountered Lydia and Judith. He saw at once that they knew what had happened. Their informant was Mr. Plunkett, who, with the zeal of the inveterate gossip, had hastened out a moment before to spread the news of Basil's surprising defection.

Lydia was standing in a dark corner of the hall, and consequently, Basil did not observe that she stretched out both hands, as though to stop him, as he hastened past. The brief glimpse he caught of her face gave him merely the impression of a pair of mournful eyes gleaming in a countenance, half in shadow, that seemed to him set and stern. She pitied him, perhaps, but she condemned him inexorably. The words, "Ah, Basil!" uttered in a soft voice, but as he imagined, with an accent of reproach, caused him an additional twinge.

How could he guess that the effect on her had been precisely the opposite of what he supposed? That, so far from meaning to rebuke him, she longed to express her admiration of his courage, but was restrained by timidity arising from her mistaken idea of his attitude towards her? Despite her prejudices, her whole nature thrilled with a proud perception of the intrepidity of his course. He had acted as she would have wished to act, in his place. Her dauntless spirit took fire at the thought. What mattered it if he *was* wrong? He believed himself to be right, and had been brave enough to declare himself without regard to consequences. She knew, or rather, thought she knew all it must have cost him, yet he had not flinched. In the hasty view she had had of his features drawn with pain, she had seen how the struggle must have hurt him. All the woman in her stirred at the sight. Her only impulse was one of sympathy and compassion. She longed to console him, to pour the balm of affection—such affection as only a woman bestows, unquestioning, ungrudging, infinitely tender—upon his wounds. Affection! That was not enough; she felt that she could give him her very soul. Never again could she think of him lightly or even tamely; his familiar figure, which had been one of the commonplaces of her daily life, had suddenly become heroic. Her ardent nature was awake at last; it burned with the flame of a passion akin to his own.

Basil passed her without pausing—he dreaded further reproaches from her—and Lydia's heart sank. He cared no longer for her sympathy. He was quite indifferent to her opinion, whether good or bad.

It was otherwise with Judith. As he drew near her, he slackened his steps, and when she put out her hands, he did not ignore them, but clasped them eagerly.

"I have heard all," Judith exclaimed. "You have been very brave."

Lydia gazed at them, in helpless pain. She longed to cry out, "I, too, think you have been brave, and I love you, Basil!" But he had turned from her to Judith; she would have permitted herself to be torn with pincers rather than utter a word.

"I did nothing more than my duty," said Basil, "I won't pretend it was easy, but I claim no credit for it; it was forced upon me. Indeed, I am to blame for not having spoken before. I must confess the consequences frightened me. You see I am not so valiant, after all. It is consoling to me to find there is at least one of my friends who thinks none the worse of me; I thank you from my heart."

He continued to hold her hands while he was speaking, and Lydia could see that he was gazing gratefully, lovingly, as it seemed to her, into Judith's eyes.

"No, he does not care for me at all," she groaned. "He never felt for me what he feels for Judith."

Sick at heart, dreading to see more, Lydia turned hastily away and fled to her room. A revolution had been wrought in her. She had learned at last what it was to love and to suffer. From a child, she had become, in one moment, a woman. Life had ceased to be for her an idyl; she comprehended its seriousness, its possibilities of pain. She flung herself upon her bed in an agony of tears. He was lost to her—lost. And he might have been hers, hers forever, but for her childish folly! Her punishment was more than she could bear. All her soul was in revolt at the cruelty of it. She glanced, through her tears, at her little altar and wondered whether, if she knelt there and prayed, she would find relief. No: God was no longer good to her; He had permitted this to happen; He did not concern Himself about her. She must wrestle with her grief, alone. She would wrestle with it. Where was her pride? Springing to her feet, she angrily brushed away her tears. As she

did so, her gaze happened to rest upon a little picture, tacked to the wall, that Basil had given her years before. It was a picture of an Italian peasant boy, with daisies in his cap, whose dark eyes, Basil had told her, reminded him of hers. She stood looking at it for some time. He must have loved her, then. It was consoling, at first, to dwell upon this thought, but when she reflected that he loved her no longer, her misery returned with added force. A fierce cry of pain escaped her, and seizing the picture, she tore it from its place, intending to destroy it. The next moment, with a sudden change of impulse, she kissed it passionately, and pressed it to her heart.

CHAPTER XXV

Basil was one of those who fight best when the odds are greatest. There was a reserved power in him which came into play only when he found himself in serious trouble. He could not have explained why it was, but in any grave emergency, he was conscious always of a strengthening of his purpose. Unknown to himself, he had acquired the discipline which qualifies a man to lead forlorn hopes. The hard training he had had, almost from boyhood, in his efforts to cope with the disorder in his father's affairs, had developed in him a kind of alacrity in facing difficulties and hastening to grapple with them. The situation had often seemed desperate; he had pressed on, not with any clear hope of winning, but with a stern, almost eager determination to spend himself to the uttermost in the effort. There was a sacrificial spirit in him—a spirit that often caused his inclinations, his personal interests to shrivel and look small. The call of duty rang for him a clarion note, drowning even the passionate cry of his heart. For such a man, fidelity to duty is measured only by his capacity to endure.

Basil's power of endurance was now subjected to an incomparably harder test than any it had ever known. All that he had accomplished hitherto, seemed child's play beside the ordeal he was called upon to undergo. But his spirit rose with a growing sense of combativeness as the prospect darkened, and his thoughts were busy with the difficulties he had to meet and how best to cope with them. Grief gripped his heart with remorseless hand as he rode swiftly homeward; in spite of the pain, he fixed his mind resolutely on the future and the line of action he ought to

take. First of all, his father's slaves must be freed. His father had always been inclined to manumission, and now that he, Basil, had declared himself, it should be no longer delayed. It was the logical consequence of his avowal. He would stultify himself if he failed to urge it. Equally binding, it seemed to him, was the moral obligation of at once taking arms for the Union. If it were criminal to destroy the Union, ought he not to offer to defend it? He might find himself arrayed, sword in hand, against his friends. It would be a terrible situation, but he must face even that.

He smiled sadly, with a grim sense of humour, at the thought that his course would be justified even from the "States' Rights" point of view. Maryland was still a member of the Union; in fighting for the Union, therefore, he would be fighting for his state. He was more consistent, according to their own reasoning, than his Secessionist friends.

On reaching home, he sought his father in his study where he found him seated at a table piled high with books. Mr. Kent was writing on a large sheet of unruled paper slowly with a quill pen, forming every character with laborious pains. He was very fastidious on this point. A blur on a page of manuscript, the indistinctness of a letter offended his eye; he had the true scholar's love of accuracy even in the smallest details. A strong light from a large lamp fell full upon his face which, though sallow and wrinkled, possessed a singular charm, a spiritual beauty. It was the face of a dreamer as well as a student, and in the large, earnest brown eyes, there was a brooding wistfulness, as if they were constantly searching for and never finding the ideal.

Though living almost wholly in his books, Mr. Kent was not without a deep and tender interest in all that affected his son and his friend, the Colonel. His sympathies were the more acute from being confined to so narrow a sphere.

The outer world was, for him, a restless dream; his world lay within the four walls of his study. He derived great pleasure from Basil's daily visits. It was delightful to know that he had such a resolute, strong young fellow to lean upon, and one, too, who understood and respected his need of seclusion.

"Well, my son," he said, looking up from his work with a smile as Basil entered, and speaking in a softly modulated voice whose musical tones carried with them a suggestion of cultured ease—one never hears such voices in coarse or impetuously busy men—"you had, of course, a pleasant day at the Manor?"

"No, father," said Basil with a sigh, taking a seat at his side, "it was the saddest day I ever spent."

As briefly as he could, he described what had happened.

Mr. Kent stroked his thin brown beard with a thoughtful air. He did not appear to be surprised, but was evidently grieved.

"It must have been very hard," he said, in a sympathetic tone. "And yet, you could not have done otherwise. Of course, you know I share your opinions."

He was rather proud of the fact that his approval had an appreciable value. Although a book-worm and a solitary, Mr. Kent was not without his weight in the community—due chiefly to his reputation for learning. There was profound respect for literary acquirements among the planters. Most of them were college bred; not a few dabbled in composition for their favourite newspapers; even the more ignorant envied those who could quote scraps of Greek or Latin. Mr. Kent was a prolific writer of essays on a great variety of subjects, not only for the county newspaper but for journals in Baltimore and Philadelphia. His style was ornate, sonorous; with a liberal garnishing of classical phrases. His opinions were usually sound, but this was a

fact of minor importance; what most impressed his readers was the erudition he displayed. Though timid by nature, he was a fierce controversialist—on paper; his power of invective was greatly admired. His son was more discriminating. He attached importance to his ideas because, as a rule, they were liberal, with a strong dash of originality, and supported by a clever marshalling of facts. Mr. Kent never took anything for granted; he was imaginative, speculative, but a passionate searcher after truth. There was intimate sympathy between father and son.

"Yes," answered Basil, "I was quite sure of that; the knowledge helped me."

"We must free our slaves," said his father, after a slight pause. "It is not a new thought to me, as you know; I have often weighed it, and it has caused me many a troubled hour. My father had the same doubts. If the truth were known, they have been shared by every slaveholder of ordinary intelligence and heart." Mr. Kent took a worn, yellow paper from a pile of old documents lying before him. "Here is a letter written by your grandfather to a friend in Virginia as long ago as 1807," he continued, unfolding the sheet and disclosing a page of fine handwriting, somewhat faded but still distinct. "I have read it often, and only this afternoon, I came upon it again. It reflects my own views so accurately that I will read a passage from it. You will perceive that your dislike of slavery is inherited. Your grandfather owned many more slaves than you and I own now, and this is what he wrote to a fellow slaveholder on the other side of the Potomac: 'The political Horizon is assuming an appearance very unpleasant indeed; the late papers give reason to fear that the proceedings of the British Admirals have been authorised by their Government and that this forms the commencement of a premeditated attack. Britain is menacing us on the one hand and Spain on the

other, and the accursed system of slavery, which I detest with all my soul, which every day is becoming more execrable to me, has given us an internal Enemy, which, in the event of a War, might be equally dangerous with either.' Language could scarcely be stronger than this; yet 'detesting' slavery, which was becoming more 'execrable' to him every day, my father made provision in his will for manumitting but few of his slaves. Why? For the same reason that I have continued to hold them. He saw, as I have seen, that our whole social fabric rested upon slavery as its foundation. Only a general movement could effect a safe and equable reform. Individual movements might work injury to society and even do harm to the slaves themselves. We deemed it wiser to wait until the public conscience was stirred, and in the meantime, to mitigate the evils of slavery as best we might. Perhaps, we were mistaken, but the time we waited for has come. Slavery is doomed—in Maryland, at least. We shall but anticipate a general emancipation. I am glad I waited for you to do what I dared not undertake, for not until now would we have been able to provide for the maintenance of our people as freemen. To have sent them forth as beggars, would have been a doubtful kindness indeed."

"Yes," said Basil, "the estate is rid of incumbrances, and we have a considerable sum in bank. I think we could spare each family a bit of land and a cabin."

"Thanks to you, my son," said Mr. Kent warmly. "In enabling me to right a great wrong, you have made my old age happy. To give a hundred human beings freedom, and not freedom merely, but the means of support! What greater happiness could there be? And this happiness will be yours and mine to-morrow—but yours, first of all, for you shall tell them."

"There is another thing, father," said Basil, hesitating.

He knew he was about to inflict a blow. "I must leave you; I have determined to seek a commission in the army."

"The army!" said Mr. Kent, startled.

"Yes," said Basil, steadily. "Is it not my duty? I have youth and strength: ought they not to be given to the cause I have espoused? Would you have me remain inactive here while others, weaker than I, are fighting for their opinions? If I fight against my friends, is that my fault? Would I not feel dishonoured if they should prevail without my having struck a blow? Would they not have real cause to despise me, then? Besides, I am so unhappy here. You cannot imagine how I suffer. To live among those I have loved and honoured, feeling that they look askance at me, could there be greater misery? Away from them, in the stirring life of the army, I might, at times, be able to forget."

"You are right, my son," said Mr. Kent, sadly. "It is a bitter choice; God be merciful and send you back to me!"

Early next morning, Basil sent an order to the Quarter for the negroes to assemble on the front lawn. After breakfast, he went out doors to smoke his pipe and await their coming. He seated himself on a wooden bench in a quadrangle formed by the walls of the house and a low fence of latticework over which clambered honeysuckle in great luxuriance. The front of the house, with its long main building and projecting wings, defined three sides of the quadrangle—a spacious green court planted with roses. Some of these climbed over the walls to the roof, waving clusters of fragrant blossoms before the windows. The house was said to have been planned by one of the Lords Baltimore for a kinsman to whom he had granted the land and from whom the Kents were descended. His lordship would seem, from the size of the structure, to have been a person of liberal views—at least, in matters of architecture. The great

building, painted white and prominently placed on a knoll overlooking the river, might have been mistaken by strangers viewing it from a distance for some public edifice of marble.

The grounds, unlike those at the Manor, were almost bare of shrubbery and trees. There were a few gnarled locusts on the lawn, an immense horse-chestnut at the gate, and immediately in front of the house, two decapitated poplars whose trunks were hidden by ivy which fell in waving drapery of vine and leaves from the tops. The even sweep of the lawn was broken on the south by a ravine which widened into a meadow of several acres, with a small lake shaded by weeping willows of great size whose drooping branches touched the water. Near the head of the lake, some projecting stumps formed tiny islands, and from the soil at their roots, sprang wild rose-bushes loaded with dainty pink blossoms. From the back of the house, a broad expanse of open land, with an orchard of fruit trees on one side and a rambling garden on the other, sloped gently down to the river.

While waiting for the negroes, Basil glanced about him with a feeling of keen regret. It was hard to have to tear himself away from his home. He loved it not only from inherited instinct and from long association, but because he had won it, so to speak, for himself. At one time, his father had been in imminent danger of losing the property; but Basil, after years of patient labour, had succeeded in clearing off the load of debt and even in accumulating a fund in reserve. During the years he had thus worked on, alternately hoping and fearing, he had acquired a deep and intimate love of the place, which had struck its roots, as it seemed to him, into the very soil. Does not one always cherish a peculiar attachment for anything one has saved and made his own? Basil's feeling was the stronger from the sense of

honest pride in his success. It was due solely to him that the name of Kent was still associated with the place, as it had always been. Sometimes, glancing up at the family portraits in the hall, he thought, with a glow of pleasure, that the eyes of his forefathers looked down upon him gratefully for what he had done.

And now, he was about to leave it all, perhaps forever. He gave a deep sigh at the thought of the hard, immitigable fate that was driving him from everything he held most dear; but as the negroes began to make their appearance on the lawn, he roused himself to the loyal performance of the duties that had laid their iron grasp upon him.

The slaves soon gathered in front of the quadrangle. They numbered nearly a hundred individuals, including a dozen or more pickaninnies who had followed the procession from the Quarter in order to see what was "gwine ter happen." The older negroes were also very curious. They had no suspicion of "Marse Basil's" real reason for summoning them. The general impression was that some serious fault had been committed by one of their number, and that "Marster" was about to make an investigation. They questioned each other cautiously in the vain effort to discover the identity of the imaginary culprit.

When the last straggler had taken his place in the ranks, Basil advanced to the quadrangle gate and stepped upon a large stone, used as a carriage block, so that all might see him. The negroes, who had been chattering volubly, subsided at once into quiet and attention.

When Basil, in a few words, had explained that they were free, and that each family was to have a house and lot, the negroes burst into a shout of joy. They had been happy enough as slaves under "Marse Basil's" strict but kindly rule, but freedom seemed to them to hold out delightful possibilities of ease, of idleness, of independence. "Give God

de glory!" screeched a withered crone. The whole assemblage took up the cry, and shouted, with one accord, "Give God de glory!"

Some of the older negroes pressed forward to testify their gratitude to "Marse Basil," and as he offered them his hand, saying, "I am going away to the war, good-bye," they grasped it, one after the other, murmuring some homely phrase of greeting and farewell. Old Bantam, the patriarch of the Quarter, raised his trembling hands, and said, "May de good Lawd shine upon yo' face fur ebber mo', Young Marse!" Others exclaimed, "God bless yer, Marse Basil—don't forgit er po' ole nigger," or "Good luck ter you, Young Marse, en' ef dar's enny lovin' thing I kin do, you knows whar ter find it."

Basil's nurse in childhood, Melindy, a short, chunky dame, waited until the last, and then waddled up to him with an air of great importance. Her eyes twinkled with delight, and when she had clasped his hand in her toil-roughened palms, she hesitated a moment, as though half afraid, and then, with a sudden dive, imprinted a kiss upon it. With a sidelong glance about her to see that no one observed the act—it would lose its potency if not done secretly—she slipped into Basil's hand a tiny bag of black silk.

"Dat's er cunjered bag, honey," she whispered, in an awe-stricken tone, "Ole Man'l chawmed it fur me. Hang it roun' yo' neck fur Ole Nuss's sake. Hit'll bring yer good luck sho', en' send de bullets flyin' wide o' de mark."

Basil humoured her by accepting her talisman. He knew he would distress her sorely if he refused it; it were quite hopeless to attempt to convince her of the inefficacy of the treasured "chawm." Melindy uttered an exclamation of relief, and in a strange singsong, broke forth into the quaint invocation—

" May yer fus' days be yer wus',
Yer las' days yer bes',
En' Heav'n—may it be yer place uv res'!"

Convinced that "Marse Basil" was now proof against ill-fortune, Melindy bobbed her best curtsey, and wheeling about, marched off to her companions with her turbaned head thrown proudly back and her black face shining with triumph. "He wuz my nuss child!" she exclaimed, exultingly; "but, fo' de Lawd, when I toted him in dese arms, I never 'spected he'd some day give us our freejum!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Now that the die was cast, Basil was eager to get away with the least loss of time. Every day's delay meant added anxiety for him lest he be brought into contact with his former friends. The Colonel paid several visits to Basil's father in the hope of enlisting his aid in "bringing Basil to his senses," but Mr. Kent stood firm. On these occasions, Basil succeeded in avoiding the Colonel. He knew that nothing would come of a meeting but added pain. Within a week, he had arranged his affairs, and was ready to start. He was spared the sorrow of many leave-takings. There was but a single house—the Rectory—at which he felt he would be really welcome. Even the Colonel had expressed himself with some bitterness when Mr. Kent told him of Basil's determination to take up arms for the "Yankee" cause. It was hard for Basil to pass the Manor on the road to the Rectory and not stop at the gate. As he rode slowly by and turned in his saddle to take a last look at the spot which was hallowed by so many tender memories, the consciousness of all he had had to give up was brought home to him with sudden acuteness. Was he Quixotic? Perhaps. And yet, he could not have acted differently. Honour held him fast. There was no other way. He rode on past the Manor with set face and a keener pain at his heart.

Judith was at home with the Rector, in the latter's study, writing a sermon from his dictation. She often did this in order to spare his eyes which had troubled him of late. It was a strange occupation for the brilliant stage beauty, and she was fully conscious of the irony of it, but what did it matter, if she helped the good old man who was so tenderly

kind? The sermon happened to be an elaborate defence of slavery reinforced by various Biblical quotations. The Rector was an ardent Secessionist. He had originally been a Federalist, and was reputed to have owed his selection by the vestry, some fifty years before, to this fact. At any rate, Judge Cheston, representing the vestry, had written to the Bishop asking him to recommend a good Federalist, and the Bishop had nominated Mr. Magruder. The latter's predecessor had been "a warm Democrat," and had given great offence to his chief parishioners who, with scarcely an exception, were staunch Federalists. The Judge frankly told the Bishop, of whose sympathy he seems to have been quite sure, that the good churchmen of the parish preferred a Federalist for the reason that, if the new Rector were pious and sensible, "the circumstance of his being a Democrat" would "give strength and countenance to a bad cause." From the Federalist ranks, the Rector had passed into those of the Whigs, but when, after the downfall of the latter, the sectional issue became acute, he was converted into a radical "States' Rights" and pro-slavery man. As he greeted Basil, the idea occurred to him to read his sermon to him. If anything could move him, that ought to do so; its reasoning, in the Rector's opinion, was unanswerable. On reflection, however, he decided to have a little talk with him; perhaps he could accomplish more by persuasion.

To his great surprise, as soon as he broached the subject, Judith took up the cudgels in Basil's behalf and strongly defended his course.

"Dear me," the Rector exclaimed, in mock consternation, "I had no idea I was harbouring a Yankee emissary."

He rose as he spoke, and hurried to the door in pretended anxiety to escape Judith's onslaught.

"I have to make a visit to a sick parishioner this after-

noon," he added, on the threshold. "Stay, Basil, until my return ; I have some arguments still left in my ammunition chest that Judith won't find it so easy to demolish."

There was innocent artifice in his sudden flight. He had got the idea into his head that Basil might be in love with Judith. It seemed impossible, indeed, that it could be otherwise—she was so charming. He hoped she might have learned to care for him ; he had a high opinion of Basil. Her sudden warmth in Basil's defence confirmed his suspicions. Perhaps, if he left them alone together, they might come to an understanding. So he hurried off, feeling rather guilty ; could it be that he had actually turned match-maker in his old age? Well, his conduct was anything but dignified and might be said to savour of deceit, but for Judith's sake, to secure her happiness, he might, perhaps, be excused ; the temptation was great.

"I came to say good-bye," said Basil, as the Rector left them. "I'm going away to enter the army."

Judith sprang up, terrified. To enter the army! She might have known it. This man was sure to be consistent and follow an idea to its logical end. He was harder, less malleable than she had hoped. His awkward downrightness had become more and more apparent to her of late. At times, it had checked and even paralysed her. She was beginning to fear she had overrated her power with him, or could it be that Lydia, after all, was stronger than she? He had shown himself quite insensible to her blandishments. He had seemed to take no heed of her boldest coquetries. She was still only his friend! She felt, as she gazed into this quiet, resolute face, that it were useless to seek to dissuade him. All that she could do was to acquiesce and wish him a safe return. But suppose he did not return? He would never know what she felt. He must know! She could not bear the thought of his leaving her without some inkling of

the truth. If he carried away but a germ of suspicion, it might ripen into tenderness at last.

She sat down again, striving vainly to collect her thoughts, to form some plan. She questioned him mechanically as to when he was to leave, where he was going, what his purposes were, and suggested that he seek the aid of Edgar Cheston, who had written her he had some influence in Washington, in his effort to obtain a commission. His answers fell vaguely on her ears; she found it difficult to fix her attention. All the while, the thought was ringing in her brain, what could she do to enlighten him without losing his confidence, his esteem? If she had but more time! She was almost tempted to risk all, to fling herself into his arms and proclaim the love and longing that were torturing her. No, he would only pity—and despise her. She couldn't bear that. She dared not even indulge herself in an incautious glance, a rash word, an informing gesture. She must sit mute as to what was vital to her, and babble of indifferent things.

When the Rector returned, he was disappointed to find that, apparently, his stratagem had had no results; there was no indication in the manner of either Judith or Basil of what he had hoped for. Basil rose to go, but Mr. Magruder insisted upon his remaining for the night. After supper, he held him in earnest discussion until Judith finally rose and withdrew to her room on the plea of a headache. She had lingered merely in the hope that some chance word might give her a clue; some accident might come to her aid. Nothing had happened; she was at her wits' end, baffled, desperate, bitterly contemptuous of herself for having failed so miserably.

The Rector found it impossible to change Basil's resolution, and when his obstinate young friend rose at last to say good-night, he shook his head mournfully, and exclaimed,

"It was that Northern college that brought you to this. I always told your father he was making a mistake in sending you to Harvard."

"But my father thinks as I do," said Basil, amused.

"Oh, that is easily accounted for!" retorted the Rector, with a shrug of his shoulders. "He spent many years at the North and was thoroughly inoculated with the Abolitionist virus. I have always thought it a misfortune for Southern men to go North at all."

Judith had not gone to bed. She was sitting in her room, partly undressed, and had thrown a dressing gown about her. Why she waited, she did not know. There was no hope of seeing Basil again that night. He would soon be in bed and dreaming of Lydia—perhaps. If she could only think of something she could do. There was nothing, she told herself fiercely, that she would not do, no trick she would not practise upon him, if it offered the slightest chance of bringing her closer to him without exposing her to the danger of a repulse. But none suggested itself that was not instantly rejected as impracticable. She was fatally hampered by the dread of making some false move that would separate her from him forever.

At last, she heard Basil's step upon the stairs. It drew nearer, and then died away as he entered his room on the other side of the hall. He was there—so near her, yet so remote. Ah, had she but the power to compel him! Furious with the sense of her impotence, she rose and paced restlessly up and down the room. What a beautiful creature she was as she moved with swift, impetuous step to and fro, her finely modelled figure showing its graceful lines under the loose, flowing robe; her sunny hair tossed in a glittering mass about her shoulders; her lovely face aflame with pain and passion.

Presently, she paused near the door. It was ajar, and

through the crack, she saw that Basil's door was partly open. Looking again, she saw Basil himself; he was seated at a window, smoking. Stretching out her rounded arms, which were bare to the elbows, the loose sleeves having fallen back, she seemed to beckon him to her, and stood gazing at him with a look of invitation it would have been hard to resist. But he did not see her, he did not feel her presence palpitating with entreaty. She was about to turn away, with a sob, when a light shone suddenly in her violet eyes and gave them the brilliancy of sapphires. "I have found a way—the only way!" she said, with a catch in her breath. "He knows I walk in my sleep; I have often told him so. I may say things in a pretended trance that I would not dare to utter if he thought I knew. He may discover the cheat, but I don't think he will. He believes in me so thoroughly that I would have to be clumsy, indeed, to excite his suspicions."

It was merely a bit of acting. She had often succeeded in far more difficult tasks on the stage. She had but to summon to her aid the simplest elements of her art. Nevertheless, she hesitated. It was no longer fear that restrained her, but an instinct of repulsion which surprised her. An inconvenient scrupulousness had been born in her, without her knowledge. A month or two ago, she would have done the thing lightly, without the least compunction, careless of everything but the quick fulfilment of her object. Now, she recoiled from the thought of adding to her load of deceit, of profiting by a stratagem inconsistent with the character she had assumed, which every day was growing more real. The Rector's influence; her association with Basil; the new standards of conduct to which she had had to conform with daily iteration, had gradually won upon her in spite of the conviction that she could not afford to yield to them. There were times when she almost believed in

Judith Cheston, as others believed in her; when she lost all sense of hypocrisy, and was moved by impulses which she would have derided in what, she imagined, was her true character—that of Ethel Vane.

When she came to herself after these accidental lapses, she always laughed. Of course, it was only the histrionic instinct in her! How often she had lost herself in the same way in some absorbing part! There was not the ghost of a suspicion, in her mind, of the truth. She would have been amazed and frightened could she have guessed that she was passing through one of those obscure psychological processes which gradually transform a nature into something quite different from what it believes itself to be; that she was actually becoming sensitive not merely to what others thought of her but to what she thought of herself; that her soul, in other words, was seeking to break its bonds, to escape from the narrow prison into which it had been cast, and to rise to a purer atmosphere, in spite of the fetters that must always clog it.

It was this feeling that was active in her now. She shrank, with a sense of disgust, from the gross indelicacy of an act that must have been impossible for a real Judith Cheston; that is to say, a *lady*, brought up in the atmosphere of the Rectory, the Manor—the kind of woman that Basil reverenced in her. Reverenced! She tossed her head and laughed, as she was wont to do, at such awakenings, but with bitter derision of herself, a fierce throb of pain. What else was there for her? To suffer the long agony of awaiting his return, if he ever returned? No: rather than that, she would plunge even deeper into the mire. Yes, better failure and detection by him. At least, he would know of her love. Whatever he might think of her, he could never again be indifferent; it was the barren dreariness of his ignorance she could not face.

A bit of acting? It was much more than that. A trifling part in itself, it was true, but an experiment of supreme importance for her. It was not the mere applause of a crowd she would be playing for, but the only chance of happiness that remained to her. Fail? She could not fail. On the one hand, there was hope of new life, of the birth of a great joy; on the other, death—that is to say, the slow dissolution of all her dreams. With such an issue at stake, what mattered shame to her? She would bury the black memory of it in her heart where she had hidden so many evil things; none should ever know. She would make *him* help her to forget.

Fearful lest she should waver, she swept quickly across the hall; then paused a moment to collect herself, and throwing open the door, advanced with slow, mechanical step into Basil's room. Her manner was automatic, her eyes fixed on vacancy; she seemed to see nothing, but walked straight on, as though obstacles did not exist.

Basil heard her, and looked up, startled. In a moment, he saw what seemed to be the truth; she was walking in her sleep. Uncertain what to do, he rose hastily, and waited. Perhaps she would turn before reaching him, and go back to her room. But she still came on. A moment more, and her arms were about his neck, her head buried on his shoulder. Instinctively, he placed an arm about her to support her. She quivered at his touch. He felt her heart beating rapidly against him. He did not doubt for a moment that she was fast asleep. But why had she come to him? What was the meaning of her unconscious abandon? Could it be that she cherished a warmer feeling for him than he had imagined? No; that were absurd. If Lydia, with the affection of years in his favour, could be as insensible to him as she had proved to be, was it likely that such a woman as Judith would ever be more than friendly? He

was not brilliant, nor cultivated, nor handsome, and a man to win her love, he was sure, must be all of these. He must guide her back to her room, if he could. He fervently prayed he might succeed in doing it without waking her, so that she would not be exposed to the mortification of learning what she had done. But before he could make the attempt, she began to speak.

"You *do* love me, Basil!" she exclaimed, in a hoarse, quivering voice. "Thank God, you told me before it was too late! I feared you would go away without speaking; that you didn't care for me, enough. It was terrible; do you know I came near breaking down and begging you for a word? Yes, I craved even your pity!"

Her arms tightened; she drew his head slightly down towards her, as if to kiss him.

Basil gazed at her in astonishment, not unmixed with a sudden sense of attraction. Even though he believed her to be unconscious, he felt the thrill of what seemed to be an impetuous surrender of herself to him. She was very beautiful. For the first time, he was fully sensible of her physical charm. He was ashamed of the feeling—it seemed a gross infidelity to Lydia. Was he so fickle? No; that could not be, but he was human. How could he have resisted such loveliness rejoicing in his imagined passion? He had been taken by surprise; he was off his guard. For a moment, his senses were held captive; he felt a stormy impulse to press her to him. The temptation passed as he looked down at her white, set face. She did not know; she was irresponsible. It was as though he held an innocent, thoughtless child in his arms. But her words—could it be, after all, that they expressed a latent inclination unknown, in her conscious moments, to herself? Was it possible she had unwittingly exposed to him the secret places of her heart? A wave of ardent gratitude swept over him at the

thought. Ought he not to be proud and glad, to feel himself supremely honoured, if even for a moment, she bestowed upon him a feeling tenderer than any he had ever known? But he must not think of this; he must act. The situation must not be prolonged; it would not be fair to her. He ought to lose no time in persuading her, if possible, to return to her room.

"Come with me, Judith," he said softly, wondering whether she would hear and understand.

"Willingly," she answered, looking up at him and smiling dreamily, with half closed eyes, "to the end of the world!"

Supporting her with his arm, he led her slowly to the door. They were barely outside his room, when a step was heard. It was the Rector coming upstairs. At that moment, Judith, shivering, seemed to awake. Looking round her with a startled air, she exclaimed, "Where am I? What has happened?" But she made no effort to release herself. On the contrary, she hung upon him more heavily, as if trusting herself entirely to him.

The Rector's step grew nearer. Basil was in an agony of fear. What should he do? The Rector would be upon them before Judith could escape. What would he think when he saw her in his arms? But one thing—of course. How could he doubt they loved each other? And Judith? She was awake, and she still clung to him. The fact touched him with the sense of an instinctive appeal. He must shield her, whatever might be the consequence to him.

"Something of great importance to me has happened, Judith," he said, quickly. "I have discovered that I cannot go away without asking you to be my wife."

"But I do not understand," said Judith, nervously—the strain was telling on her—"just now, I dreamed——"

"That I cared for you? It was not a dream. Am I

presumptuous? Would it be possible for you to be something more than a friend to me?"

"Are you in earnest, Basil?" she demanded, trembling.

"Never more so," he answered gravely, "how I wish I had more to offer! As you know, I have wasted my substance on—on some one else. You see, I do not pretend. I am a shipwrecked man—a beggared castaway, abandoned by those who are dearest to me. But you have not deserted me—you still give me sympathy, approval, help. If I could carry away with me the assurance that they would always be mine, that I might look forward to returning some day to claim you for the rest of our lives, I would feel myself to be a fortunate man. I have at least this to offer—a devotion that would strive untiringly to make you happy."

Judith shrank from him ever so slightly. It was not mere devotion she craved, and yet, it was more—far more—than she had dared to hope for. He was ready to link his life to hers. As she looked at him, wondering, she saw he was almost eager. He was, in fact, strongly moved. True, as he had intimated with unnecessary candour, he did not love her; but he had caught the infection of her beauty, her charm, her tender graciousness, and he found himself, for the moment, imagining he might learn to love her. Amid the wreckage of his hopes, the thought was really alluring. She had understood and sympathised with him as no other woman had ever done; she had given him a confidence in himself which had, hitherto, been painfully lacking in presence of her sex; she was the only individual, besides his father, who had applauded his course and sought to stimulate his courage. He would never be lonely with her at his side. His future brightened at the thought.

And to make her happy—what duty, if she loved him, could be more urgent, more binding? She was so far beyond his deserts that it seemed an impertinence in him to

consider it a duty, a thing requiring effort. And yet he could not hide from himself the fact that it would not be easy to free himself from those dreams of another kind of happiness which still haunted him—yes, even now, in her presence. A truce to dreams! Who was he—a battered derelict—to hesitate between the royal gift she offered him and the mere memory of something, indescribably rare and precious though it was, that could never be his? He ought to go down on his knees and thank her for having taken pity on him. And she had said she craved *his* pity. Pity for what? For having been so rash, so prodigal, so undiscriminating, as to prefer him to other men? He actually felt for her, at the moment, a kind of passion—the passion of a tenderness, born of her wonderful generosity to him, such as often moves a fine nature like his to its depths. She had asked him, anxiously, if he were in earnest. Well, if he ever faltered, she should not know it. Any sacrifice should be easy for her sake. If it were necessary to reassure her, he must even be prepared to simulate a feeling responsive to all her demands. He *might* have to do that if she exacted too much before he had effectually disciplined himself. There were limits to veracity that seemed permissible—even obligatory—in such a case.

His exaltation caused Judith's heart to leap with hope. Unwittingly, she had touched the very chords in his nature which would vibrate most sensitively in unison with her needs. She had appealed to his chivalry, his compassion, his sense of gratitude, his craving for sympathy; she might hope to fan these into a steady flame of love. For one glorious moment, she had been conscious of an impulse of passion in him; but she did not deceive herself—it was only a spark which she had accidentally struck from the baser ore. His integrity was her real reliance. He had pledged himself to her, he would *try* to love her. She

smiled bleakly at the thought that it would be a point of honour with him. The very quality in him she had dreaded would make in her favour.

"If I could make *you* happy!" she whispered, hiding her face on his breast. How she wished she could feel the modesty she feigned. For his sake, she wanted to be what she seemed. She was really confused, and even timorous. The complete success of her daring manœuvre frightened her. He must not see her face, just yet; it seemed to her he must read her thoughts in it. It was not enough to have deceived him; she must keep him blind. After this, he would hate her if he ever learned the truth.

The Rector had reached the top of the stairs. He was holding a candle above his head to light his uncertain steps. In its flickering glow, he beheld Judith and Basil but dimly at first. Coming closer, he perceived that they stood waiting for him, Basil's arm clasped close around Judith's waist. The ambiguity of their position here, at this hour, with Judith in dishabille, did not strike him. He saw only that his hopes had been realised; that they had come to an understanding.

"Can you give her to a Yankee, sir?" asked Basil, forcing a smile.

Tears came into the Rector's eyes; he could scarcely speak.

"If she were not a partisan of yours already," he said at last, with an attempt at humour, "I might hope she would help me to convert you, yet."

Judith left Basil's side and hastened to him.

"You do not refuse him, grandfather?" she asked, giving him a grateful kiss, "I am a happy woman!"

"God grant you may ever be, my darling!" said the Rector, embracing her tenderly.

With a softly murmured "good-night," Judith turned and

hastened to her room; she was nearly spent. On the threshold, she paused and threw a glance of mingled love and gratitude at Basil. "Good-night," she repeated, inclining her head to him, almost humbly.

"Good-night," he said.

Safe in her room, Judith flung herself exhausted into a chair. "The best piece of acting I ever did!" she exclaimed, with a harsh, discordant laugh. "And it was good because it was not all acting, either. I felt what I seemed to him to dream. I have known what it is to live!" For a moment, she was confident, happy; then, her fears returned. "He must never know," she murmured. His simple faith in her—a faith which had accepted her subterfuge at once, without a trace of doubt or even scrutiny, as something that must necessarily be real—awakened new aspirations in her. Ah, if she could but keep him as he was—unsuspecting, reverent of her, untouched by her shame! He would always be true to her—if he never knew. She would be true to him, in so far as she could. It was impossible to wipe out the past, to throw off her disguise; but if loving service, counting no sacrifice or cost, could absolve her, she might hope some day to feel that she had atoned to him for her deceit. The light by which she would steer her course would be what he wished, what he believed in and respected. That should be the only law for her. Deep down in her heart, lay the hope that she might be able, in spite of all, to prove herself not wholly unworthy of him. She could even imagine the possibility of becoming, not good as the world defined goodness—she could never be that—but responsive to his impulses, his ideals, the sharer of even his sterner views of duty, because they were his.

CHAPTER XXVII

As yet, Oswald Reeve had had no opportunity of learning the effect on Lydia of Basil's avowal at the dinner. Burning with impatience, he nevertheless restrained himself. It would not be in good taste, he thought, to call at the Manor immediately. Basil had been an intimate in the household, and doubtless, the whole family was in grief over the loss of one for whom all had felt strong affection. But while he waited, news came to him of Basil's engagement to Judith Cheston. What a lucky change in the situation! It seemed almost providential. Surely, this was his opportunity. Even if Lydia loved Basil, she must turn from him, now, in resentment at his open transfer of allegiance to another, and listen, if only from pique, to his (Oswald's) suit.

Greatly encouraged, he set out for the Manor on the afternoon of the day of Basil's departure for Washington to apply for a commission. Lydia was at home—so the servant told him at the door, adding that she was somewhere in the garden. Oswald went in search of her, and soon found her under a great linden near a grape arbour at the back of the house. She was seated in a rustic chair, an elbow resting on one of the arms, her hand supporting her head which drooped rather wearily. A book lay open in her lap, but her thoughts were far away from its pages. As it happened, Oswald could not have found her at a more inauspicious moment. Judith had just left her, after telling her of her engagement to Basil, and she was suffering acutely.

She was suffering the more because she was suffering dumbly, and knew that she must continue to suffer thus, to

the end. Hers was a grief that could be confided to no one. She might not even whisper it to the air, scarce even acknowledge it to herself. Her maidenly pride bade her deny it, beat it down, refuse it harbour in her most secret thoughts. Grieve for one who was pledged to another? The mere idea was shameful, intolerable. She had looked Judith calmly in the eye and had congratulated her without a tremor. To every one else, she must exhibit the same indifference. She would hate herself if any one suspected her secret.

She had not seen Oswald coming, and when he spoke to her, she was taken by surprise. Annoyed, she rose and returned his greeting with an air that was chill and almost sullen. Why was he here to force her to smile and be polite when her aching heart craved solitude and silence? But recollecting herself and the courtesy due him, she pointed to an empty chair, and said with a feeble effort at gaiety:

"You bring me pleasant news, I trust, Mr. Reeve. I am terribly blue; only disagreeable things have happened of late."

Neither her manner nor her words were encouraging, and Oswald's hopes sank. But it was too late to draw back.

"I am very sorry I have no pleasant news," he said, watching her closely. "We have both lost a friend—at least, for a time; Basil Kent left this morning to join the Union Army."

He expected she would show either lively resentment or keen distress. To his astonishment, her face lit up, her dark eyes glowed, and she exclaimed,

"I am so glad of that! It was the only thing for him to do. He has the courage of his convictions. I honour him for going; he is a noble fellow. Ah, that I were a man that I, too, might fight for the cause I believe to be just!"

She loved Basil! There could no longer be any doubt of

that. There was a fire in her eyes which told of admiration outweighing prejudice, scorning all littleness of thought or feeling, and breaking impetuously through the trammels of prudence and a woman's instinctive reserve. But did she know of Basil's engagement to Judith? A glimmer of hope remained. He had yet to gauge the nature of her pride.

"You have heard of his engagement to your cousin?"

The question was a cruel one for Lydia, but she faced him bravely.

"Yes, Judith left me but a moment ago. He will be a fortunate man if"—here her voice broke a little, in spite of her efforts to control it—"if he ever returns. Judith is a charming girl. She is not only very beautiful, as you know, but lovely in every way, and wonderfully clever."

Oswald gazed at her in mute surprise. What a brave, generous creature she was! It was clear to him, now, that the quality in her which had impressed him from the first with the sense of impassable distance between them was a native loftiness of soul which hated all meanness or evasion. This girl was not afraid to look truth in the eye, even though it might stab her. She was immeasurably above him. There could be no real sympathy between them. Her spirit climbed fearlessly to heights he could never hope to scale.

He did not wish to scale them. He coveted her beauty, her charm, her wayward temper, even, which added the spice of uncertainty to his passion, but he felt he would never be able to follow her in her more intimate thoughts and impulses. How could he? Did he not know himself to be a mere pretender? Truthfulness, loyalty, gratitude—had he not convinced himself that they were but empty words for him in any real crisis? The only use he could make of them was the superficial one of social convention: they were virtues which, of course, he must seem to cherish as badges

of gentility; but there was the bitter consciousness that they had no power in him against the coarse desires of the flesh. He could admire her proud sincerity with a keen feeling of envy—the worst of it was, he was sensitive to fine impressions—but in the daily association of married life, it might be inconvenient. He would never rise above the level of material ease and self-indulgence. Even if she cared for him, she must have found this out some day, and then——

He was seized with a sudden sense of fear. He could never face her! How she would despise him! What must be her hatred if, by any chance, she discovered it was he who had driven the man she loved away from her and into the arms of another! And he had gained nothing by it. On the contrary, he had hurt himself. His treachery had served only to raise Basil in her esteem, to confirm her in an unselfish devotion to him and to make *him* conscious of how contemptible he must seem to her. Even if she never knew him for what he was, there was in her something that must always elude him, and in himself a grossness which would infallibly shock and repel her. None the less, he wanted her. She was so rare a creature! As he looked at her, his passion flamed up, smothering his sense of guilt, his doubts, his dread of her ultimate perceptions. For the time being, he might possess her. So long as her ignorance lasted, she would be his. Ah, what joy to hold captive this ardent spirit breathing infinite scorn of what he knew lay dormant in him!

"When are you going South, Mr. Reeve?" asked Lydia, with a faint show of interest. She did not really care; nothing mattered much, now.

The question stung Oswald. He had professed himself an ardent Secessionist, in the hope of winning favour with her, and since his recovery, he had spoken frequently of his intention to join the Confederate army. No doubt, she was

mentally contrasting his tardiness with Basil's promptness. It was clear she was utterly indifferent to him. She even seemed inclined to chide him for loitering at her side. What chance had he with a girl who could thus coolly remind him that he was pledged to a duty which might mean death? His idle fancies were swept away by her words.

"To-morrow," he said, stiffening suddenly. It was all over; he might as well go. It would be a way of gaining some credit with her. "I came to say good-bye."

Lydia gave him her hand; it trembled slightly. There was a suppressed feeling in his voice which affected her painfully. A wounded heart is acutely sympathethic. Could it be that he cared for some one? She reflected a moment. He had not been particularly attentive to any one but herself, and it had never seemed to her that he was very much in earnest. She had known that he liked to be with her, to talk to her, and at times, she had even suspected he might admire her, more or less. But that he cherished a deeper feeling, she had never dreamed. No hint of it had been conveyed by his manner, which, from prudential motives, had always been carefully guarded. She had thought of him only as a pleasant trifler, a friend who had certain claims upon her, whom she had found entertaining and easy to entertain. It was for this reason she had accepted his attentions carelessly, and even, in moments of anger at Basil, had turned to him with a confident feeling of impunity. Perhaps, there was latent in her mind, all the time, the sense of the social difference between them. In spite of her strong liking for him, it would have seemed improbable to her that he could ever think seriously of asking her to be his wife. After all, he was his father's son. But whatever the cause, it was evident he had met with some disappointment that had made him unhappy. A sudden pity welled into her eyes; for the moment, they were almost tender.

"Good-bye, Mr. Reeve," she said, in her gentlest voice.

Oswald took the hand she held out to him and clasped it mechanically. It was not thus he had hoped it might be given him—merely in token of farewell. Her compassion hurt him. It seemed to him to emphasise the absurdity of his hopes, the finality of their parting.

"Good-bye," he said, and dropping her hand, he bowed and left her.

Lydia watched him mournfully until he had disappeared within the house. She glanced about her at the bright mid-summer beauty of the garden, feeling even more miserable and forlorn than before. Why was life so lovely and yet so sad? It was all a strange puzzle. She had once been so keenly alive to the charm of the quaint old garden, but now, she derived no pleasure from it. There was only a dull feeling of apathy. And yet, it almost seemed as though it were trying to look its best to rouse her. Seldom had she beheld it in a brighter setting. The sun, blood-red, was sinking in a mass of violet cloud whose edges were tipped with silver. In a clear open space above, a fleecy fragment was caught up in graceful folds, as of delicate lace. Fireflies twinkled among the box-trees and trailed their flash-lights over the smooth turf at her feet. A polished horseshoe, hanging by a nail from the gray trunk of the linden, caught the red rays of the sun and glowed like a monster ruby. The grass was already damp with dew, and the air was perfumed with a cool,delicious fragrance, with a faint scent of clover blossoms. Here and there, a gaudy butterfly flitted, pausing at some flower to take a last sip before turning in for the night. Suddenly, a whip-poor-will, perched on the roof of the verandah, sounded its shrill, plaintive note. It seemed to her to voice her grief, to ease her heart a little. She was grateful to the bird. There was something sad in Nature too, after all; it wasn't quite insensible to her anguish. The

whip-poor-will uttered for her the rebellious cry of her heart against fate.

Oswald hurried away from the Manor, driven by a fierce eagerness to plunge into some kind of rashness, he knew not what. He was willing enough to go South, now—there would be plenty of distraction there—but if only something would happen on the way! He dug his spurs into his horse and drove him on furiously, almost hoping he would run away with him and beat his head against a tree or fling him into a ditch. At a sudden turn in the road, he nearly ran into Turlo Cheston, who, mounted on a fiery hunter, was riding quite as recklessly.

Turlo pulled up, turned, and came back to Oswald, who had also checked his horse.

"What the deuce is the matter?" demanded Turlo, rolling heavily in his saddle—it was evident, at once, to Oswald, that he was more than half drunk. "You were riding like mad, and look as if you had the Devil behind you!"

"I have just been at the Manor to say good-bye," answered Oswald, "I am going South."

"Are you though?" said Turlo, his eyes gleaming, "I'm about to start myself; we might go together."

He had a shrewd suspicion of what had happened to Oswald. For some time, he had seen quite clearly that Oswald was heels over head in love with Lydia, and he made no doubt that he had tried his luck and failed. Of course, he had failed. He liked Oswald well enough, but what could the fellow expect? How absurd to suppose that Lydia could care for him! He was handsome, agreeable, everything a girl could wish for, but he was a Reeve. The idea of his marrying a Cheston, especially Lydia, the proudest girl alive! None the less, he pitied Oswald. He knew—only too well—what he must be suffering, for he, himself, was suffering in precisely the same way. His beautiful

cousin, Judith, had just jilted him—yes, jilted him, that was the word for it—in the most cold-blooded manner. Turlo swore a great oath at the thought. She had led him on to think she cared for him, had used him to protect herself from gossiping tongues, and then, when quite sure of her own happiness, had given him the mitten. He harboured no thoughts of revenge against her. Her secret was as safe with him as it had ever been—he was a gentleman, and he loved her—but her treatment of him was hard to bear. He had gone to her that day, full of hope, to ask her to be his wife, and she, radiant with happiness, had informed him, quite nonchalantly, that she had just engaged herself to Basil Kent. Oh, curse the luck! He was ready for anything wild. He had spent several hours at a tavern drinking hard, with no other result than to inflame his wrath. He was ripe for any mad adventure. Go South? The very thing. There, men were fighting, and riot reigned. He longed to be in the midst of it. He would cut, slash, tear things to pieces, and perhaps, be smashed by a cannon ball in the glorious chaos.

"I'm with you, old fellow!" he cried, his face aflame. "Say the word!"

Oswald gazed at him with sudden sympathy—he understood. Turlo's admiration for Judith had been open, undisguised from the first.

"He, too, has been hit hard," he said to himself. "We both seek the same thing; we are comrades in misfortune. And then, he is Lydia's brother."

"I shall be very glad to have you," he said to Turlo, who seized his hand and shook it hard.

Next morning, they set out together.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Edgar Cheston was still in Washington, and seemed, from the tenor of his occasional letters to Judith, to be absorbed in political affairs. She had begun to hope that he had found a field for his energies which might prove more attractive than even the Manor. He had always loved power and the exercise of his talent for controlling men; what more probable than that he would be tempted to enter the political arena where great opportunities were now presenting themselves to unscrupulous and daring spirits, such as his, in the demoralisation that had already resulted from the war? If this happened, he would be likely to leave her unmolested. In any event, he was interested in strengthening her position; he would still need money. He might even be made to see that her marriage to Basil was perhaps the surest means of protecting both him and herself from possible disclosures. As the wife of a man of Basil's character and social standing, she would be doubly intrenched.

She was mistaken in attributing to Edgar any ambition other than that of obtaining possession of the Manor. Nothing seemed to him worth striving for, compared with the satisfaction of regaining what he had lost; of revenging himself upon those who had made him suffer; of becoming what he had been meant to be—the head of the family—in spite of all. There was still alive in him a kind of pride—a perverted form of the family instinct—which invested the mere position of Master of the Manor with a consequence, an authority, a subtle, peculiar influence that he coveted with all his soul. He had felt the savour of it as the acknowledged heir; there was no incense like it, for him. He

lingered in Washington only because he was seeking there the means of ensuring the success of his plans. He had seen, from the first, that Maryland would probably remain in the Union—if not voluntarily, then under compulsion. It was clear to him that the North would not permit the withdrawal of a State that offered the only road to the Federal capital, and he did not doubt its power of coercion. He meant to be on the winning side: he might need help. The people with whom he would have to deal at home were all Secessionists; if it became necessary to put pressure upon some of them—that slippery rascal, Reeve, for example—it would be very convenient to have the Government at his back. It were easy to work in the dark. Nobody at home need know. In any event, it was important to make himself safe from molestation; if he were not known to be loyal, some meddling provost marshal or spy might cause him trouble just at the moment when any interruption would be most embarrassing. No: he was not wasting his time in Washington—he was making a distinct impression in official circles; more than one member of the Cabinet had listened attentively to his views as a "border State" man.

There was another motive for his return which neither he nor Judith suspected. His interest in her was deeper than either of them knew. Judith, indeed, was inclined to think it almost wholly mercenary. There had been a time when she had accepted it for something else. She had even flattered herself with the idea that he really cared for her in a way, and very strongly. Her beauty, she was sure, had power over him; there were symptoms of hot jealousy now and then. But when he revealed himself as an old man, exposing all his ugliness to her, she concluded she had exaggerated his feeling. It was merely sensual and subordinate. At any rate, whatever it was, it had not been strong enough to deter him. It was evident he valued what she could

obtain for him more highly than he valued her. The thought gave her great comfort. If she could but make him see that it was to his interest, he might even be amiable about Basil. She little dreamed that his feeling for her had only been smothered for awhile by a more engrossing passion; that it needed but the spark of jealousy to set it aflame.

A few days after Basil's departure, she was roused from her illusions with a roughness that startled her. A brief note from Edgar informed her that he had returned from Washington and was at the Manor. It ended with a summons to her to meet him in a sheltered place behind the church. "I have something to say to you privately," he added, "we must not be overheard. No house is safe—especially the Rectory, with that prying Tippett woman about."

What did his sudden reappearance mean? Perhaps Basil, who was now in Washington, had told him of their engagement, and he had hastened back to put his veto upon it, to reassert his control. Was he afraid she would throw him over? Could it be that he did care; that he was jealous of Basil? Fool—as if she could ever be the same to him! She shuddered at the thought that if he had conceived so absurd an idea, he might have found some means of injuring her with Basil—she knew how clever he was in sowing the seeds of suspicion without compromising himself. It would be a difficult task for him to discredit her and still maintain the fiction of being her father, but it seemed to her he might be capable of even that. As the hour he had set for the interview drew near, she hastened to the appointed rendezvous in a fever of anxiety.

The spot was well chosen for secrecy—a quiet corner of the churchyard screened by the walls of the church and a tall hedge of cedar. A moment after her arrival, Edgar appeared, forcing his way through a narrow gap in the

hedge. He was carefully dressed as usual, and seemed in a pleasant humour.

"Punctual to the minute," he exclaimed, glancing at his watch. "Well done—for a woman."

He took her hand and offered to kiss her, but she drew back quickly, with a gesture of repugnance. He affected to be amused, but his eyes gleamed angrily.

"What, not one kiss for your Father? Well—as you please. But really, you are cruel. I never saw you look better. Your life here agrees with you, my dear. Positively, you are more beautiful than ever. It is quite evident you haven't been bored. From what I saw of young Kent in Washington, I wouldn't have imagined him to be so entertaining."

Judith winced; her fears were not unfounded. Basil *had* spoken to him. What had he said to Basil? What was he about to say to her?

"You won't interfere?" she demanded fiercely, "I love him!"

"Indeed!" said Edgar, with a sneering laugh, "that's a naive confession."

"You think me incapable of loving?" she said, bitterly. "You fancy you did your work so well that I am wholly perverted? I ought to be—you did your best to form me on your own model—but there is a touch of natural feeling in me, still; you didn't succeed in making me wholly bad and artificial—like yourself."

"I had no reason to complain of your lack of natural feeling—for me," he said, insolently—she had cut him to the quick.

"I wouldn't boast of that, if I were you," she retorted, "You know very well that you imposed upon me; that you took a base advantage of my ignorance. Of course, I was attracted by you—oh, you were very clever! I never saw a

more deceptive make-up on the stage. And how artfully you humoured me, how adroit you were in making me think myself fortunate—a girl who could do anything she chose, who could set aside all ordinary rules, whose only law was to please herself—and you! You little dreamed what you were doing when you placed me among good people. They have opened my eyes. I know, now, what I owe you. I shall never forgive you—never!"

"Oh, very well!" said Edgar, affecting to make light of it, "I'll try to worry along. But really, you do owe me something for having brought you here; I seem to have let you in for a good thing. I must confess I would have hesitated had I known the use you would make of your opportunities. It may play the deuce with my plans!"

In spite of his pretence of indifference, he was alarmed. It was evident his influence was seriously threatened. She would not have been so bitter against him if she were not enamoured of Kent. It was true—as she had said—that he had fallen short of complete success in "forming" her. That would have been disappointing enough in itself, but this was worse—to find that she was mutinous, that something had wakened in her a dangerous spirit of resistance. He had never counted upon this. He thought he had tamed her and made her docile to his lightest wish, and lo! she had turned upon him. Had he blundered, after all, in choosing her for his confederate?

When Basil Kent had come to him in Washington and asked his consent to his marriage with his daughter, he had almost laughed in his face. Of course, she was fooling this guileless young countryman. His daughter! If the fellow knew! What was her game, he had instantly asked himself. That she had some practical end in view, or, perhaps, was merely amusing herself, he did not doubt. He had hastened

to her to satisfy himself of the real state of things, and to warn her against committing any imprudence. And she had the audacity to talk to him of love. She was actually in earnest. She, who had been his puppet. He was torn with jealousy—the furious jealousy of an old man, who knows he has no chance against a young lover. Her beauty had intoxicated him, long ago, and abusing his influence over her without the smallest compunction, he had moulded her so cunningly to his passion, persuading her that most men were but replicas of himself and there was nothing better to look for, that he had believed her incapable of caring seriously for any one else even though she ceased to care for him. It maddened him to think another man might possess her. Until now, he had not realised how strong a hold she had upon him ; there was in his mind so confident a sense of mastery, that it had been easy to convince himself she could never wholly escape him. She might dislike him, but she would obey. Like a well-trained animal, she would come at his whistle. There had been brutal pleasure for him in the thought. To lose her altogether, to know that some one else had power over her—a kind of power he had never enjoyed—this brought to him a sudden, fierce perception of the fact that he wanted her for herself, not merely because she was useful to him. For the moment, he could conceive the possibility of letting everything else go if he might but retain his hold upon her.

What folly ! It was but an idle whim, of course. He must shake it off. He was amazed and even disgusted with himself. What—give way to precisely the same sort of weakness he had ridiculed in her ? Was it possible he, too, was guilty of a form of that stupid obsession called love ? Fudge ! He was too old a bird for such nonsense ; there were serious interests at stake. It was merely an impulse of admiration—he had always been so damned susceptible—which

he could easily gratify elsewhere. There were other women as beautiful, who would not be indifferent to him. He could no longer deceive her, but it would be easy to resume the disguise of middle age and play the same trick over again with women who did not know him. And yet, as she confronted him, superb in her wrath, he was inflamed by the desire to seize her in his arms, to press her lovely head down by sheer force upon his shoulder, to tell her he would never give her up.

"You really seem to have a fancy for that clod hopper," he said, with a vicious snarl, "what is it you find in him?"

"Everything I failed to find in you," she exclaimed hotly, resenting the slur on Basil.

"He must possess some phenomenal qualities."

"They are summed up in a few words: He is an honest man."

"And you—are an honest woman?"

Outraged, she flashed upon him a murderous glance. The wretch—to ask this question of her whom *he* had degraded! She felt as if some loathsome reptile had reared itself in her path. The words, the look, the man himself were all abominable. The worst of it was, he had a kind of right to taunt her. Had she not obeyed him indifferently, without a struggle? And he had spared her in nothing—nothing! Who was she, he might well ask her, to place herself at the side of a man like Basil Kent, to claim his love, his confidence? No, she could never cleanse herself from the stain this monster had put upon her, or even forget it so long as he lived and could remind her of it.

"Take care!" she cried, "you may go too far!"

There was hatred in her eyes, and he saw it. For the moment, she frightened him. He had lost her—that was clear. He must not lose the Magruder fortune or the Manor. He might lose both unless he pacified her. Without

her, he could do little or nothing. It was hard, but he must give her her head.

"I begin to believe your forte is tragedy, after all," he said, with a clumsy effort at his former negligence, "however, there is really no occasion for playing heroics with me. What difference does it make what you are, or what I know, provided your future husband doesn't know, and need never know, if you are prudent? It happens that I am the only individual who could supply him with definite information. You have been useful to me; you can be more so. It is true I don't relish your sudden fancy, but it seems to have taken such hold on you that the only thing for me to do is to try and reconcile myself to it. Of course, you must make it worth the effort."

Judith's eyes flashed joy. He had not betrayed her to Basil—yet. He still wanted something else more eagerly than he wanted her, in spite of the fierce outburst of jealousy which had so astonished and shaken her. If she could purchase even comparative freedom from him for the time being, complete deliverance might, some day, come. Whatever happened to her, at least this thing was precious—that Basil should not know. Let him name his conditions! There was no price she would not pay for silence, save only the renewal of the hateful intimacy which, for a moment, he had seemed about to demand.

"You *have* been prudent, I hope?" asked Edgar suddenly, struck by the thought that she might have confided something to Basil. "You have told him nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Good! You might easily have wrecked yourself with him with a word. My brother tells me he is the 'soul of honour.'" Edgar's lip curled derisively. "That means he'd never pardon an indiscretion in a woman."

"What do you want of me?" she asked, impatiently.

"Oh, very little!" he said, with a shrug of the shoulders, "I merely wish to be reassured. I feared you might have lost your head. I know something of these infatuations in women. They often blind them to facts. It was necessary to remind you. We are still indispensable to each other—that is all I seek to make clear to you. You admit it, don't you? I may take it for granted I may still count upon your help; that you will do nothing to prevent me from winning the stake we started out to play for? You've changed so much—I hope you haven't any foolish scruples on that point."

"None at all," she said, curtly. What a relief to know that it was merely a question of money! The Magruder fortune was now a matter of indifference to her. "You mean the inheritance?" she asked, with an air of contempt. "You are welcome to the whole of it."

"Thanks," said Edgar dryly, "that would hardly do. Your future husband might think me grasping. Half of it will serve my purpose just as well. It would look better if we took an equal share. Perhaps, I might claim as much in right of my wife."

"As you will," she answered carelessly, "I fancy I shall have earned my share. There is nothing else?"

"Nothing except the inconvenience I may possibly cause some of your new friends. You'll not mind that?"

"If I do, I shan't object. I ask but one thing of you—silence; you have promised me that. Be sure I shall hold you to your word."

"Well, we understand each other. Our treaty is renewed, for mutual defence? It is merely a question, now, of keeping up appearances. This is the last time, I hope, we shall have to hold a secret conference; it is always dangerous. A word overheard might ruin all."

What a shock for him had he known that he was even

then being overheard! The eavesdropper was the very person he had feared—Mrs. Tippett. She had accidentally entered the church some minutes before, and hearing voices outside, had cautiously opened the vestry door, and peering through the crack, had discovered Edgar and Judith in close conversation. Only fragments of sentences reached her, for they had been careful to draw away some distance from the church and were speaking in lower tones than at first. But she had gleaned enough to rouse her suspicions. A bargain had been concluded between them for the division of the money. Each of them was to have half—in other words, the share she would have received, had Judith never appeared to claim the whole. What did this mean? And Edgar—so Judith reminded him—had promised silence; immediately afterwards, he had spoken of a treaty "for mutual defence." Why should such a compact be made between father and daughter? Clearly, there was something wrong. How unfortunate she had arrived so late and had heard so little! She waited anxiously, hoping to hear more, but Judith merely said, "I shall take care, for my own sake, not to compromise you; I won't forget my lines!" Edgar nodded, as if pleased, and then, they parted with perfunctory goodbyes, Judith going one way, Edgar another. There was a dark mystery here—what was the key to it? Mrs. Tippett racked her brain for a plausible theory. Evidently, there was rascality at bottom. They wouldn't have met thus clandestinely unless Edgar had some object to gain that wouldn't bear the light. Was it possible there was a flaw in Judith's title to the inheritance? Mrs. Tippett's heart beat quickly at the thought. She would wait and watch. The girl was sly—she had suspected it for some time and was sure of it now—but she had great faith in her own cleverness. She had never yet known a secret to baffle her in the long run. And this time, she would leave no stone

unturned. Was it not her duty? Had not her whole life been dedicated to the uprooting of evil and to "doing good"? A fortune might be at stake. If she could rescue it from so notorious a loose liver as Edgar Cheston and convert it to worthy purposes, would she not be culpable if she neglected any means? Full of righteous zeal, she started at once upon her inquisition, like a hound upon the trail.

CHAPTER XXIX

EDGAR conducted himself most amiably at the Manor. It was essential, at first, to win general confidence in order that he might obtain the fullest mastery of affairs. There was plenty of time, for certain formalities must be complied with before the Magruder inheritance could pass fully into Judith's hands. Until the money was actually in his possession, he could take no decisive step. Meanwhile, he could well afford to be ingratiating. He wished to lead his brother on to further extravagances so that he would compromise himself irretrievably, and if he could delude the other members of the household by affecting to be kindly and well-disposed, it would be easy to make them unwitting accomplices of his schemes. He was afraid of his mother's acuteness and took special pains to please her. As to the Colonel's wife, he had no apprehensions. He knew she mistrusted him, but she could do nothing against him without endangering herself.

In a little while, he seemed to have identified himself completely with his brother's interests. His one object, to all appearances, was to repair the family fortunes; to restore to the Manor its old prosperity. He professed to his mother the intention to transfer his claim upon the property ultimately to his nephew, Turlo, so that the latter might succeed to the estate unencumbered by it. "Judith is amply provided for," he explained, "and of course, I am anxious that the Manor should be held in the family name. Turlo will probably marry soon. His children will found the family anew." His wish seemed a natural one to old Mrs. Cheston, and was most gratifying to the Colonel. It was in accord

with a deeply-rooted instinct of the plantation class—an instinct which explains the tenacity which the old families of Tidewater Maryland exhibit, even in these days of disintegration and decay, in clinging to their homes.

So strong was the feeling of local attachment and family pride that, when an old homestead was on the point of passing into alien hands, some member was often to be found—occasionally among far distant shoots—to come to the rescue in order to "keep it in the family." It was not uncommon to hear of sons who had wandered off in search of fortune returning, when fortune had been secured, to prop or renew the falling house. In many instances, men turned aside from professional or business occupations to take upon themselves the burden of extricating from debt an estate which had fallen into incapable hands. The feeling of family obligation was stronger than the craving for individual success. The love of the "old place" eclipsed the allurements of fortune and renown. To rehabilitate it and establish it once more on a firm foundation was a work of blended love and pride more tempting than anything the world had to offer. It was but natural that Ole Miss and the Colonel should imagine Edgar to be actuated solely by these motives. The truant had, in their eyes, merely returned to do his traditional duty.

The Colonel placed himself unreservedly in Edgar's hands, with a feeling of grateful confidence and relief. Edgar, he argued, knew just what ought to be done, and had the power as well as the inclination to do it. When Edgar proposed to advance further sums for repairs to the buildings and improvement of the land, he accepted the offer without hesitation. The additional burden of debt he was assuming gave him no concern. Why should it? Edgar was interested, almost as much as himself, in "building up" the estate for Turlo. It would have seemed absurd to him that

any influence hostile to himself or to Turlo could be working in Edgar's mind.

There was but one person in the household who was not deceived. The Colonel's wife could not conquer her dread of Edgar. Every now and then, it was quickened by chance indications in his manner, an incautious word or two, a swift, inquisitive glance. When they happened to be alone together, he was always mockingly deferential, and sometimes, even tender. She was sure he meditated some cruel form of revenge, yet nothing happened. Week after week of suspense crept slowly by, and still, Edgar gave no sign. Meanwhile, his influence over the Colonel grew apace, and she could do nothing to put her husband on his guard. How could she convince him her mistrust of his brother was anything more than a nervous caprice ? He would make light of her fears unless she told him their cause, and it was precisely this she was passionately anxious to conceal.

Little by little, Edgar absorbed the management of the property into his hands. He no longer took the trouble to pretend to consult the Colonel, though he talked farming with him for form's sake and because he wished to avoid political discussions. It was almost impossible to extract an opinion from him upon public affairs. The Colonel chafed a little at his lack of interest in what, for him, was the absorbing topic, but attributed it to his preoccupation in the business of the estate.

The time for action arrived at last. Within a few months, the Colonel's indebtedness had become so great that his bankruptcy was assured, provided the slaves, who represented his working capital, could be taken from him. This had become a comparatively easy task. An encampment of Union troops had been established in the neighbourhood, and negroes were flocking to it from all parts of the country. The idea had spread among them that not only would

freedom be secured to them by the military arm, but the federal government would provide for all their bodily wants. The prospect offered a tempting bait. The slaves deserted the plantations in droves.

Edgar set to work through the agency of Smyrk, the overseer, who, wishing to propitiate the new master, had become his eager ally. Smyrk employed a negro preacher to second his efforts. At first, they found it uphill work. The Manor slaves were thoroughly contented. "Ole Marse" had always been kind and indulgent, their work was light, and they were sure of good clothes and a profuse abundance of victuals at the Quarter. Besides, they derived a certain pride from the fact that they were "Manor niggers." The slaves had their own social lines, determined by the position of their owners. The Cheston slaves held first rank among the "quality" negroes of the neighbourhood, and were loath to relinquish this distinction. Attachment to their old home and to the family also acted as a strong deterrent.

The preacher returned to Smyrk, discouraged.

"I kaint budge 'em," he said. "Dey 'pears ter make no 'count o' de Guvment. 'Ole Marse en' Ole Miss is good enough guvment fur us,' dey sez. 'We ain't so sho' uv dat udder guvment you talks erbout. Hit mought be better, en' hit mought be wuss.'"

"You'll ha' ter skeer 'em," said the cunning overseer with a wink. "Tell 'em the Colonel's deep in debt, en' they'll ha' ter be sold. That'll fetch 'em."

The preacher returned to the Quarter with this tale. It worked like magic. The negroes knew "Ole Marse" *was* in debt. What more probable than that he would be compelled to sell them—perhaps "to Georgia," as selling them for transfer to the far Southern States was called among the slaves. They did not know that the war rendered this impracticable. It was a peril, immediate and real for them, at

which the boldest shuddered. The Maryland negro had in fact, a peculiar horror of being "sold to Georgia." It was seldom done by the more humane planters, and then, only as a punishment for serious offences. It meant to be torn from family and friends and dragged away to what was believed to be a much harder form of servitude, to conditions all the more dreaded because unknown.

A panic took possession of the Manor negroes at the mere suggestion. Only old Cæsar, Dinah, Phyllis and the Colonel's "body servant," Pompey, held out against the general scare. They did not believe in the danger, they said, and even if it existed, they wouldn't leave "Marster" until compelled. All the others hurried off as soon as darkness came to shroud their movements. Even Chloë's love for Young Miss was not proof against a temptation appealing equally to her fears and her passion for running away.

The blow was a heavy one for the Colonel. His pecuniary loss scarcely affected him at all, but the absence of the familiar figures about him caused him cruel pain. He had looked upon his slaves as being, in a certain sense, his children—even the oldest among them,whom he always addressed as "Uncle" and "Aunty." Like children, they were helpless creatures whom he must provide for, instruct, rebuke or indulge. Many of them had been companions of his boyhood with whom he had played and hunted. Others had been the nurses or out-of-door preceptors of his early childhood to whose quaint stories he had often listened with rapt attention. The great majority had grown up under his eye. A thousand homely impressions endeared them to him. Their apparently voluntary desertion wounded him all the more keenly because he had no suspicion of any inciting cause. Old Cæsar, who informed him of their flight, considerately withheld from him the fact that his apprehended ruin was the animating motive. An instinctive sense of delicacy

restrained the old negro. It was not for him to tell "Marster" that the real state of his affairs was better known to his slaves than to himself. He wished to spare both his feeling of security and his pride. It might be that the disaster would be averted, though Cæsar had begun to suspect "Marse Edgar." If it was not averted, it would make itself known soon enough. At any rate, it should not be his hand that struck down the one being he loved above all others, whom he had dandled on his knee as a child.

The Colonel had no thought of attempting to induce the negroes to return. If, after all his care and kindness, they could desert him of their own choice as he imagined they had done, it would be an idle task. If they came home disappointed, he would receive them kindly, and care for them as before, but he had no hope of that. A few stragglers might appear some day, but never again would he see them all in their accustomed places. The mere novelty of freedom would tempt them far, and they would soon be scattered, wandering hither and thither at the mercy of wind and weather. The utmost he could do was to send word by Cæsar that the Quarter stood open for them whenever they chose to come back.

Sad at heart, he walked down to the Quarter at nightfall, hoping against hope that some had returned. The building was empty. Tears glistened in his eyes at the sight of it, a shadowy mass in the darkness from which came no sound. Usually, at this hour, it was gay with lights and laughter, but now, for the first time in its history, it was silent and deserted. It was as though Death had entered, to abide there. And death, indeed, was there—death to the Old Order which the Colonel so passionately loved.

CHAPTER XXX

Reeve was disagreeably surprised by Edgar's pretended devotion to the family interests. It had been his firm conviction that he would promptly exact the payment of the money due him from the Colonel. Apparently, he was neither grasping nor revengeful, but inclined to help his brother. Reeve concluded that age had tempered him and he had settled down at last into a quiet respectability at the Manor, relieved by occasional visits to Baltimore where, the lawyer suspected, he indemnified himself by going on a spree. He knew the black sheep among the "Quality" so well! There was a latent pride even in the most depraved of them that sometimes converted men who had been prodigal in their youth into steady home lovers in their old age. At first, Edgar's activity in the management of affairs at the Manor caused Reeve no little apprehension. If he took it into his head to pry into the accounts, he might discover facts which would enable him to bring ugly charges against him. Edgar was much too shrewd not to draw conclusions that might be very damaging. Reeve regretted, now, that the Colonel's obtuseness had tempted him to indulge his greed rather recklessly. Then, too, Edgar might advise retrenchment, and if he managed economically, he might baffle him in his designs upon the property.

But Edgar did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he led his brother on to greater expenditure. Reeve chuckled at each new extravagance; it was another step towards the Colonel's downfall. Unconsciously, he fancied, Edgar was playing into his hands. In course of time, he was completely reassured, as Edgar gave no sign of suspecting him. Evi-

dently, he had not thought of sifting the accounts. It would soon be possible, now, to foreclose. He had no fear of Edgar's bidding against him at the sale, for he had satisfied himself he could not command any large amount of money. The Magruder inheritance had been left in trust, and Edgar's daughter could not touch the principal. At most, she could control only the income, some ten or twelve thousand dollars a year—a trifle compared with the sum that would be required to outbid him for the purchase of the Manor. He was quite serene on this point, for he, himself, had drawn the will.

One afternoon, late in the autumn, Reeve was seated in his office looking over the papers which contained the history of his dealings with the Colonel in order to refresh his memory before deciding finally upon his course of procedure. He still wished to avoid an open break with the Colonel. If only Oswald were at hand! It was possible, when disaster overtook her father, that that haughty little piece would be more willing to listen to him. But Oswald was far away in the South—he knew not where. He might be wounded or even dead—no, he would not admit to himself that this was possible. It would be too cruel. What folly in the boy to rush into danger merely because of a girl's caprice! He had begged him to go abroad again, but he had refused on the plea that she would think him a coward. Ah, well, he would have all straight for him when he came home; he would fix things so that Oswald would be able to present himself to her as the future master of the Manor—a very different individual in her eyes from the young fellow she had treated so shabbily. His dream, he tried to persuade himself, might be realised after all. At any rate, once in possession of the Manor, he would hold it, not as his own, but in trust for Oswald, so that he might have another chance with the girl. Of course, he would not

disturb the family; they should continue to live there at a nominal rent, and they would be forced to admit that he knew how to behave with some delicacy!

Reeve's office was illustrative of the man's curious pride. It was a mere wooden shanty, so old and crazy that it seemed on the point of tumbling down. People thought it odd he should have built so grand a residence and yet continued to transact business in this hovel. He clung to it because its very meanness tickled his vanity. It was eloquent, to his mind, of all he had accomplished. If his "mansion" showed the height to which he had risen, his office revealed the depths from which he had lifted himself by his own efforts. He would not even permit the furniture to be changed. It was old and ricketty—a few oak chairs; a tall desk, covered with green baize, splashed with ink, and a large table, all whittled and carved by waiting clients who had sought to relieve their tedium with jackknife exercise. Rough pine shelves held a somewhat meagre collection of law books. It was one of Reeve's boasts that he carried his law in his head. He felt more at ease here than in his luxurious home. The atmosphere was better suited to his tastes. Here, he could be his real self—the rough and ready man of affairs, respectful to some clients, familiar with others, with no fear of violating social proprieties.

Reeve was interrupted in his examination of the Manor papers by a tap on the door, and a moment later, Edgar Cheston entered.

"How are you, Reeve?" he asked, with a careless nod.

The lawyer rose quickly, and greeted him with his usual air of obsequiousness. He imagined Edgar had got into deep water in his efforts to manage his brother's affairs and had come to ask him to help him out. He was not unwilling, if there was profit in it. Cupidity was still strong in him. He was one of those rich men who are never quite

rich enough; besides, he thoroughly enjoyed the sense of having got the better of a clever opponent in a bargain.

"What can I do for you?" he asked solicitously, when Edgar was seated.

"I came about those mortgages on the Manor," said Edgar.

"Yes?" said Reeve, inquiringly. He assumed that Edgar was about to ask whether more money could be borrowed.

"I've decided to take them off your hands."

Edgar had arranged the matter without trouble with the Colonel, who was, in fact, delighted when he proposed to take the mortgages himself instead of having them transferred to Judith, telling him he meant to make Turlo his heir. Edgar had not yet made up his mind whether to content himself with the virtual possession of the Manor which the ownership of the mortgages would give him, or to become the actual purchaser at public sale. The former course would be easier and create less stir. If his brother "turned rusty," he could have recourse to the more drastic measure of foreclosure and ejection.

Reeve glanced at him incredulously. What could he mean? Was he trying a poor joke with him?

"I suppose you know they amount to a considerable sum," he remarked.

"Oh, yes." Edgar smiled pleasantly. "But that's all right; I have the money."

Reeve drew back, staggered. Of course, it was merely a "bluff." He fancied he knew the extent of Edgar's resources quite as well as he did.

"You thought you'd tied up the Magruder bequest," continued Edgar, with a lazy air of amusement. "Well, the best lawyers sometimes make mistakes. There was a flaw in the will. The trustees have decided that my daughter is en-

titled to the principal. In fact, they have conveyed it to her. She has divided with me. I can command something over a hundred thousand dollars when I need it. My brother consents to the transfer. You only want your money. I am ready to pay it."

Reeve turned livid. Was the prize for which he had struggled and schemed and waited so patiently to be wrested from him just at the moment it seemed about to fall into his hands? Had Edgar told the truth? Was it possible he had committed so fatal a blunder in preparing the Magruder will? It seemed incredible. Never before had the validity of a document drawn by him been disputed. His accuracy in such matters was proverbial in half a dozen counties. Had he, so skilful in digging pitfalls for other people, unconsciously dug one for himself? The idea was maddening. But even if Edgar had the money, he might not be able to outbid him. He could not compel him to give up the mortgages. He would not give them up! If he could do nothing else, he could at least humiliate the Chestons by compelling a public auction of the Manor. His square, powerful jaws hardened suddenly, and his lips closed tight with obstinate resolve.

"The mortgages are not for sale," he snapped out.

"Perhaps not—to any one but me," assented Edgar, easily. "You don't think I shall allow you to proceed to a foreclosure, do you? And why should you? Of course, *you* have no idea of buying the Manor."

The sneer exasperated Reeve. It meant, to his mind, that he was supposed to be incapable of harbouring so presumptuous a notion.

"Why shouldn't I?" he demanded. "Suppose I wanted it for my son?"

"Absurd!" said Edgar, with a careless wave of the hand, "you must be out of your wits to think of such a thing.

Your son master of the Manor? You are a clear-headed, clever fellow, Reeve. Now, put it to yourself. Would it not be ridiculous for you or your son to attempt to play the part of a big landed proprietor? To step into the shoes of my family, who have been rooted at the Manor for two hundred years? You know this community and its prejudices. Everybody would be shocked at your audacity. As to your son, you would simply blast his career. People, I am told, have been kind to him, owing to my brother's endorsement; the most exclusive have taken him up. Of course, they would drop him like a hot potato."

Edgar's words were so many drops of caustic to Reeve. They ate into his old wounds and caused them to smart afresh. He felt as if he had been branded over again with the stigma of social inferiority, and that the same detestable mark had been placed upon his son to whom he had looked so confidently for redemption. He was conscious again, and more acutely than ever, of the hopelessness of combating the hateful class domination which Edgar's easy insolence so coolly asserted. These Chestons, somehow, had a way of making him feel that nothing he could do would ever change their attitude of careless condescension. If he could but crush them! Well, they would be humbled a bit by having the Manor put up to the highest bidder. If he had had any doubts or scruples, Edgar's cutting speech would have effectually dissipated them. It was now open war between them. Rather than be beaten, he would spend every dollar he had.

"I'll take the chances!" he cried, hoarse with passion. "If I win, I'll show the world I am too strong for you. The plain people will be on my side. Your kind will jeer at me, of course; they've always done it. I was a fool ever to think of earning their approval. I meant to let your brother down easy; now, I'll smash him. He'll have you to thank

for that. You might have had a friend in me; you preferred to drive me into the other camp. There are plenty of people only waiting for a leader to rebel. They've been kept down for generations, but they've never relished it, and I know how to stir 'em up. How do you like my motto—'new blood against the old'? Oh, it'll take!"

"So that's your game now?" said Edgar imperturbably, "my dear fellow, the time isn't ripe. It might work a few years from now; at present, you couldn't rally more than a few hungry paupers to your side. Chaos is coming, but it hasn't come. Of course, the North will win; it has the weight of numbers, of money, of great industrial forces. When its victory is assured, our order will crumble to pieces and your crowd will come to the front, but for the moment, we are intact. You would merely beat your head against a wall. Come—be reasonable. I'm not spoiling for a fight; however, I warn you, if we come to blows, you may be sorry. I've had a good many tussles in my time, but I always took care to be well armed, and you see I am still alive."

"I'm not without a weapon or two, myself," growled Reeve, uneasy but dogged. Edgar's unruffled confidence was beginning to tell on him.

"Enough of this!" said Edgar, wheeling round in his chair, and speaking, for the first time, in sharp, curt tones. "I offer you the full value of the mortgages; you refuse. Very good. Now, listen to me. I prefer to settle this matter amicably because I hate bother. You choose to fight. You think you might baffle me by forcing the sale of the Manor and bidding against me. That wouldn't suit me at all; I'm not inclined to waste my money. You won't listen to reason; I must use other means. Well, you are a Secessionist, a leading Secessionist, a marked man. Of course, I know you've been active only because you wish to court popularity; in reality, you don't care a button which side

wins. But the federal authorities think otherwise: they regard you as likely to be troublesome. At any rate, I am so informed. They've begun to make arrests about here. You've been spared, so far, because of the influence you are able to exert—you best know how. No doubt, you think yourself safe. So you are, as long as I keep silent. I have but to say the word, and you'll be landed in Fort McHenry to-morrow. Have you any fancy for that?"

"You!" cried Reeve, with a taunting laugh. "Why you are the Colonel's brother! If I'm a marked man, what is he? Didn't he send a whole battalion South."

"He answers for himself," said Edgar, coolly. "As for me, I happen to be the secret agent of the War Department here. The provost marshal gets his instructions from me."

So that was what Edgar had been doing in Washington! Reeve bounded from his seat, aghast. He saw that he was in a trap. He had met his match. If Edgar hadn't lied, and the game had become too desperate for that, he had him cornered. If he threw him into prison, he might be ruined. Who could tell what would happen if he were not at hand to defend his interests? The investigation of his affairs he had such good reason to dread might be set on foot, and disgrace would follow. He must preserve his liberty at any cost. If he could only remain free, he might find some opportunity of delivering a counter stroke. He panted at the thought of possibly hurting Edgar. Even now, he could not restrain himself.

"Your brother knows you are a paid informer?" he demanded, with a malicious glance.

Edgar paled slightly. The blow had struck home.

"I'm not paid," he said, recovering himself quickly, and with almost the same sneering negligence as before, "at least, in money. Power is all I ask. It is such a convenient thing to have in times like these, especially when one has to deal

with an obstinate fellow like you. No; my brother doesn't know, and I don't intend he shall, for the present. Silence for silence, Reeve; I think we understand each other. How about the mortgages, now?"

"We'll talk about them when I'm sure you have the powers you claim."

"And run the risk of being jailed in the meantime? Our methods are rather summary, you know. However, write to Washington, if you like: I'll wait a few days; it is really immaterial to me. You'll find I'm pretty well known at the Departments. They think a great deal of me, I assure you. You see, they need men of my stamp in the border States, where the issue is doubtful. They put a high value on an agent of some nerve who knows the people and their prejudices. Practically, they've given me carte blanche."

"Take the mortgages!" gasped Reeve, choking with fury. It was like giving up his heart's blood, but he knew Edgar had the whip-hand of him. It was of no use—it might be ruinous—to persist. He longed to strangle Edgar. He was the only man who had ever got the better of him. After all, these aristocrats were really the stronger. They ruled of right; that is to say, the only right he recognised—superior force. Even in cunning, they could beat him when they set their minds to it. Damn them, one and all!

CHAPTER XXXI

THE Colonel was at Edgar's mercy. The sale of every acre of his land, of every article of personal property would barely suffice to pay his debts. Every claim against him was in Edgar's hands. This fact, however, so far from causing him uneasiness, was most reassuring. His confidence in his brother was unbounded, not only because he *was* his brother, but also because Edgar still pretended to treat their interests as identical. The Colonel rested, secure and contented, in the idea that they were partners in a kind of joint ownership of the property, with reversion to his son.

Edgar permitted him this pleasant illusion a little longer. There were certain details he had yet to arrange. On the plea of business necessity, he left the Manor and took up his residence in the county town in order that he might be able to act more freely. Hardened though he was, he could not bring himself to give the final blow in his mother's presence. All the old affection she had lavished on him as a boy seemed, recently, to have revived. She looked to him, with perfect confidence, to do the right thing. In her opinion, he had fully redeemed himself; she leaned on him proudly, as the mainstay of the family. She had not been wrong in preferring him as the brightest and strongest of her children—the one most nearly akin to herself. The true metal in him was coming out! Her attitude towards him affected Edgar, in spite of himself. He was surprised, and actually somewhat pleased to find himself capable of the weakness of hesitating to destroy the fiction which made her so happy. He relished the flattery of it. It was too bad he had to open the old lady's

eyes. He shrank from the thought of meeting their indignant sorrow and scorn. Well, he would avoid her, if he could.

The flight of the slaves had brought about important changes at the Manor. In so large an establishment, conducted without regard to economy, a staff of trained servants was indispensable to the maintenance of the usual comfort. The house itself had been designed with unconscious reliance upon the permanence of slavery. Its straggling ground-plan, with the principal living and sleeping rooms separated from the kitchen and the servants' rooms by a long series of halls and passages and stairways, obviously pre-supposed the continued command of a corps of slaves, big and little, to provide quick and easy communication from one end of the building to the other. Even the more modest of these old plantation houses would strike despair into the soul of the modern house-wife, accustomed to the utmost concentration of arrangement and to labour-saving devices of every kind.

The working force of the plantation was now reduced to four negroes. The housekeeper, Mrs. Gleaves, had been seized with a severe attack of rheumatism which kept her in bed, and Ole Miss took her place. The old lady would permit no one to help her. Her spirit rose to the occasion. She was deeply incensed against the slaves who had absconded. For half a century, she had toiled to make them happy, and this was how they repaid her. "I will show the ungrateful creatures," she exclaimed with flashing eyes, "that I can do without them much better than they can do without *me*." Cæsar was engrossed with outdoor work. The whole burden of responsibility fell upon him. Smyrk, the overseer, feeling himself to be a privileged person owing to his confidential relation to Edgar, made the merest pretence of working, and dawdled about, with his hands in his pockets, sneering at Cæsar's efforts, with the aid of Pompey, to keep

the farm affairs going. Dinah, who was very skilful with the hoe, relieved Cæsar, to some extent, of the care of the vegetable garden, and the old man made shift to attend to the horses and cattle, besides performing a prodigious amount of labour in the fields. Some of his negro acquaintances ridiculed him for toiling so hard for "white people" when he might, if he chose, enjoy the luxury of being as idle as themselves. At all such remarks, Cæsar would draw himself up and retort with an air of great dignity, "What you take me fur, ennyhow? Ole Marster (the Colonel's father) en' Marse Robert's allers tuk de bes' keer uv me, en' now de fam'ly needs me mos', you think I'se gwine ter set down en' see 'em suffer? I ain't dat kind! Please God, I'll do my level bes' ter keep things movin'."

Faithful old Cæsar! But for him, matters must have gone ill, indeed, at the Manor. Oddly enough, the mainstays of the establishment, but recently the scene of busy activity and animation, were now an aged negro, who had been regarded as incapacitated for heavy work, and an inexperienced young girl. For Lydia, heretofore so careless, had taken upon herself the chief burden of the domestic duties. It had been found impossible to replace the runaways with hired labour. The whole negro population was demoralised by its sudden emancipation. All were eager to avail themselves of the novel, inestimable privilege of doing nothing. The one idea among them was that they were henceforth to live without work, their simplest wants supplied by the Government. Few of them could be induced to labour, even for money; "taking service" seemed to them like going back into slavery. Pompey and Phyllis were the only house-servants, and the greater part of Phyllis's time was spent in ministering to the comfort of the Colonel's invalid wife. Lydia assumed the duties of a maid of all work. Miss Twiggs assisted her as well as she could, but she was weak

and awkward, and accomplished but little. Lydia had caused her grandmother some concern, of late, by her impatience of occupations that kept her indoors—occupations which, in Ole Miss's opinion, now that she was a young lady, were essential to her proper equipment as a plantation mistress. Naturally, Ole Miss was greatly pleased when she began to exhibit an interest in household affairs, and responded most affably to her appeals for instruction on this or that point. With a good deal of self-complacence, she attributed the sudden change to the fact that Lydia had some of *her* blood in her veins. It is more likely that the pressure of circumstances brought out the practical side of Lydia's character. She knew that she was young and strong, and it seemed to her only fair that she should exert herself to the utmost to save the older members of the family inconvenience and trouble. It was surprising how much she managed to accomplish in the course of a day. Every morning, she swept and dusted the principal living rooms and the hall, fed the poultry, assisted Phyllis with the work in the dairy, and if Dinah had permitted, would have had a hand in the cooking.

At times, she succeeded in giving Dinah a little help, on the pretext of "learning how," but it was not often that she was enabled to hoodwink the old negress who was greatly scandalised at seeing Young Miss "a wuckin' like enny po' trash." Frequently, when Lydia presented herself in the kitchen, clothed in her working garb—an old woollen gown; a stiffly starched white apron, and a jaunty cap of snowy muslin to protect her curly masses of hair from dust, the whole imparting a piquant trimness and daintiness to her beauty—old Dinah would sail towards her, with skirts outspread, crying, "Shoo, honey, shoo!" as though she were driving away an intrusive chicken. "I ain't gwine ter have yer pickin' roun' in hyar, a spilin' yer pritty han's en' com-

plexshun. How off'n hez I got ter tell yer dat?" Nevertheless, Dinah was very proud of Young Miss's activity and almost as much gratified as was Ole Miss herself. "She kin turn her han' to ennything," she asserted one day, with a grin of delight, to Ole Miss, "I b'lieve in my soul she'll soon be ez peart er ebber you wuz, Mistus."

Lydia's conduct was by no means exceptional. It found a parallel in many a Southern home. Thousands of daintily nurtured girls and women, who had been reared in luxury, with scarcely a want unsatisfied and with troops of slaves to do their bidding, were suddenly called upon to undergo privations and drudgery of the most menial kind. Most of them applied themselves bravely to their unwelcome tasks, and the courage, the devotion, the patient endurance of the women of the South should occupy a prominent place in the story of the great social catastrophe which followed the downfall of slavery.

Lydia had, of course, her moments of doubt and discouragement, when the task with which she had charged herself —that of keeping the ordinary machinery of the household in motion, pretending, all the while, a cheerfulness she could not feel—seemed almost impossible for her. She had her own secret grief to battle with, but no one would have suspected, from her ordinary manner, the poignant suffering that was lacerating her heart. She was always blithe and bright-eyed, and sometimes, even gay. Hers was the precious faculty, peculiar to her sex, of masking her emotions in loving deception of those who were dependent on her for the stimulus of a brave and cheerful spirit. It was a discipline for her, hard but serviceable—the ministry of suffering she had needed. The true woman in her was being developed. The wayward child was fast becoming the patient, loving devotee of duty.

Old Cæsar watched her with critical interest. He had

always loved her, in spite of himself, but of late, he had been inclined to carp at her more than ever. It had seemed to him she was becoming more and more careless and indifferent. Knowing, as he did, that "Marster's" affairs were in a bad way, he secretly resented her attitude. To him, it seemed almost criminal. "She wants steadyin', Young Miss does," he often said to himself, with a solemn shake of the head. Of course, she didn't know, but she was a young woman, now, and in Cæsar's opinion, it was high time for her to take a hand. Was she going to be like her mother who had never shown the slightest inclination to assume any of the duties of her position? That would be too bad. Cæsar was, above all, a utilitarian; he had but little appreciation of beauty or grace or charm unless it served some practical end. For instance, he had always cherished an open contempt for flowers. They seemed to him to be worthless, and the labour he expended on them was, in his opinion, thrown away. If they blossomed on vegetables that were good to eat, that was another matter; one might even admire them, then. It was always a relief to him to turn from pruning an evergreen or a rose-bush, to hoeing in the kitchen garden. There was some sense in that. A wild flower, however beautiful, was, for him, but a weed. And so with Young Miss. Her beauty pleased him, but it had no real value—so he tried to persuade himself—except as it might contribute to her safe establishment in life. If she failed to use it to "ketch" a good husband, it would be wasted. He was really anxious about her, and he had begun to think seriously of giving her a piece of his mind.

But now, all was changed. She had waked up suddenly. He marked the successive stages of her development with a satisfaction which, at times, he was even constrained to express. He took care, however, to be sparing of approval.

It was so easy to spoil anybody by too much praise. Lydia listened to him demurely, but with secret pride. Even his admonitions were gratifying to her. Never before, had he seemed to think it worth while to do more than grumble. Now, he found something in her to help and approve. He was only an old negro, but his sympathy was precious. It reassured her and stimulated her to greater effort. Blended with her old affection, was a deeper feeling—a feeling of genuine admiration and respect. His rugged fidelity—unassuming and wholly unselfish—touched her even more nearly than his increasing amiability to her. She was proud and grateful at having won his approval. It was something rare and sincere. Dear, cross-grained, sulky Uncle Cæsar! He should never want for anything so long as she lived.

CHAPTER XXXII

THERE was but one thing lacking to complete Edgar's satisfaction at the course of affairs, and that seemed, at the first glance, unimportant. The greater part of the Manor tract was now within his grasp, but there was a farm of some two hundred acres that might escape him. It had not been included in the mortgages, and when Turlo had come of age, his father had conveyed it to him. It was the only bit of land still unencumbered, and the Colonel, moved by a chance impulse, had, one day, decided to secure it to his son. Perhaps, for the moment, he had a vague presentiment of trouble. Being Turlo's property, it could not be made liable for the Colonel's debts. This worried Edgar. He coveted this piece of land. Without it, the Manor was incomplete. It happened, also, that as a young man, he had been given the farm to manage in order that he might prepare himself for his future duties at the Manor. He had lost it with the rest by the change in his father's will, and he could not reconcile himself to the idea of not getting it back again.

Besides, if Turlo returned from the South, and took up his residence there, he would always be a thorn in his side. Edgar had conceived the notion of making his brother dependent upon him. That would be even more satisfactory than to turn him out of doors. To hold him in his power, to make him feel that he had no other resource, to see him cringe to him —it was really an enticing prospect which fed his vanity, as well as his thirst for revenge. He might be disappointed if Turlo had a home to offer his father. It was quite likely "Bob" would balk at the humiliating terms he meant to im-

pose; if he did, it would be easy for him to take refuge at Turlo's farm. The more he thought of it, the more Edgar relished the idea of cutting him off from his only means of escape. What punishment could be greater for both "Bob" and his wife than to be compelled to remain at the Manor, fed and clothed by his bounty? And it fitted in so nicely with his desire to throw dust in the eyes of the community. People, generally, would think him kind.

He was not unwilling to buy the farm, and even to pay a fair price for it, but it was impossible to reach Turlo. He made repeated attempts to ascertain his whereabouts in the South, but could learn nothing of him. Perhaps, he was dead. At last, the matter became urgent. He had now perfected his plans, and it seemed to him important that he should act without further delay. He might not be able to hold Reeve in check indefinitely. If his influence at Washington should wane, and in politics, anything might happen, Reeve might be able to wriggle out of the net he had woven about him. There was a way to accomplish his object, but it was not without danger. His nephew was a "rebel in arms"; consequently, his property was liable to confiscation. He could bring this about without much trouble, but if his agency were ever discovered, the county would become too hot to hold him. He had no desire to excite local prejudices; on the contrary, he coveted influence and applause. It would not be so well worth while to become the master of the Manor unless he could enjoy the prestige which had always pertained to that position. It was partly for this reason, as well as to avoid discrediting himself with the Colonel, that he had so carefully concealed his employment by the Government which had good reasons of its own for helping him to guard the secret. But time was pressing, and he finally decided to run the risk.

The necessary steps were speedily taken. Through the

agency of his official subordinates, Edgar brought a formal complaint against his nephew, without appearing in the affair. The facts were clear, and easily established. An order was promptly issued for the sale of the farm by the United States marshal. At this sale, there were no bidders except Edgar. The gentlemen of the neighbourhood who might have competed for the generous satisfaction of "buying in" the property for Turlo, abstained on seeing Edgar. They had no doubt he was acting in the interest of his nephew. The farm was knocked down to him for a nominal sum. The Colonel, who had taken it for granted that political malice was at the bottom of the outrage, as he regarded it, had begged Edgar to do him this kindness, so that the farm might be saved for Turlo. When he learned from Cæsar, whom he had despatched to the scene to bring him the earliest intelligence, that "Marse Edgar" had succeeded in buying the place for a song, his heart swelled with gratitude to his brother. Mounting a horse, he rode off in haste to thank him; he could not rest until he had done so.

Edgar was already on his way to the Manor, rejoicing at the neatness with which the thing had worked. All his plans, in fact, had moved with the smoothness of clockwork. There hadn't been a single hitch. He complimented himself on the skill and finesse with which he had carried out a complicated and delicate scheme. He had deceived some of the most astute officials of the Government and used them to serve his private ends. He had successfully skirted a serious peril with Judith. He had vanquished that cunning rogue, Reeve, at his own game. To hoodwink his brother was, of course, a mere bagatelle. And now, the course was clear; he was about to know the joy of open mastery at last. The thought intoxicated him. He had meant to enlighten his brother gradually; to keep up, for a time, the pretence

of friendliness so that there should be no sudden explosion which might damage him in the public mind. But he feared he could not restrain himself. He felt a fierce desire to show his hand to his brother and shatter his hopes. He had waited so long!

At a sharp turn in the road, he came suddenly face to face with the Colonel, who reined up at once.

"You bought the farm," he cried, "thank you so much, Edgar."

"You've nothing to thank me for," said Edgar, shortly. He was irritated by "Bob's" effusiveness.

"Well, I thank you for Turlo," said the Colonel, so preoccupied that he did not notice the change in his manner.

"Turlo has nothing to thank me for, either," retorted Edgar, with a harsh laugh. He had decided to have it out with "Bob." He could bear his nauseous gratitude no longer.

The Colonel glanced at him in surprise. What was the matter with him?

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked, the joy dying suddenly out of his face. He was conscious of vague anxiety.

"I've changed my mind about Turlo—that's all," said Edgar, carelessly. "The fact is, I heard some things about him to-day that set me to thinking. People tell me he is an idle fellow, with very little brains, and reckless. Very probably, he would make a botch of things. I mean that the property shall stay in the family. Upon the whole, I think I had better marry."

The Colonel gazed at him, stupefied. Had he heard aright? Or was Edgar mad?

"You intend to take Turlo's farm?" he gasped.

"Why not? I paid my own money for it."

"But it was unfair—that sale. And you told me you would buy it for him."

"I tell you, now, I've changed my mind."

The Colonel groaned. Edgar *must* be mad.

"But the Manor?" he asked anxiously, "what about that?"

"Didn't I say I might marry? But you may remain, if you like."

"Good God!" cried the Colonel, his brain reeling, "you said you meant to leave it to Turlo."

"Yes, I said so. Again, I tell you I've changed my mind."

"But that is impossible, Edgar: it was a promise."

"My father promised it to me," retorted Edgar, bitingly. "*He* changed his mind, and gave it to you. I'm not without a family precedent, you see."

"You would make a beggar of me!"

"That's only what I was when you stepped into my shoes. I am kinder than you were—I offer you a home."

The truth dawned suddenly on the Colonel. It was a fearful revelation. Edgar had never forgiven him for having supplanted him. He saw him, for the first time, as he really was—revengeful, implacable, malignant. His brother had purposely wrought his ruin. But for him, he might, perhaps, have extricated himself. Now, his case was hopeless. No; Edgar was not mad: incredible as it seemed, he was a scoundrel. The Colonel's usually ruddy face grew white.

"I don't know you, sir!" he said suddenly, drawing himself up in his saddle. "We are strangers—you understand. Take alms from you—share your home? I would sooner starve. Of course, you will foreclose the mortgages; there will be the form of a sale, I presume. It is all cut-and-dried, no doubt, like your purchase of Turlo's farm. The moment you become its actual owner, I shall leave the Manor, never to cross its threshold again."

As he spoke, he turned his horse's head, struck his spurs

into him sharply, and galloped off. Edgar gazed after him with a look of intense vexation. The interview had been too brief, and "Bob" had not taken it as he had hoped. He had wanted to worry him, to taunt him with his incompetence, his futility; to make him feel his utter helplessness; to thrust upon him the bitter fact that his future hung wholly upon his (Edgar's) will. He had expected him to plead with him, to humble himself, and at last, to accept any conditions he might impose with the pitiful gratitude of a broken man. But he had cut him short, refused his offer, spurned him as no longer worthy of notice. Edgar ground his teeth in rage.

"I'll make him smart for this," he exclaimed. "I'll sell him out; I will, by God!"

The Colonel rode on in a kind of fury. The Manor had been stolen from him—and by his brother. He shuddered at the thought of Edgar's baseness. What more natural than that he should have trusted him? He had been so fair-spoken, so affectionate, so kind, and all the time, he was getting him into his toils. He had been glad to get out of Reeve's hands, though Reeve had always been most obliging, because he had thought he would be so much safer and more comfortable in his brother's. And now, he was ruined. Reeve wouldn't have let him come to this: he would have known when to stop him. The thing was monstrous. What a blow for his mother who was wrapped up in Edgar!

To the feeling of indignation and outrage, succeeded gradually one of deep dejection. Edgar was not alone to blame. He, himself, had been most culpable. He saw this, now. He ought never to have gotten so deep into debt. He had drifted on, thinking it would all come right, but he must have been weak, incompetent. He sighed wearily. It was impossible for him to tell precisely in what he had been deficient. He had never been con-

sciously extravagant. Was it a fault in him that he had "endorsed" too freely for his friends No gentleman could well refuse. Then, there was his mother's dower, the annuities to his sisters. Well, it was all a sad bungle. "I ought never to have left the army," he said to himself, with a groan. "Thank God for one thing!" he added, with a sigh of relief; "I've always wanted to help people, not to hurt them."

As he drew near the Manor, the consciousness of failure weighed more heavily upon him. He had lost the old place! What would people say of him? Would they not judge him harshly? Might not even the dear ones who must share his ruin condemn him in their hearts? How could he look his mother, his wife, his daughter in the face? It was a bitter thought for a man who had always had a naïvely good opinion of himself.

At the gate, he checked his horse and gazed sadly about him. The sun had set in a bank of clouds, aglow with tints of red and saffron, which were massed about an open bit of sky, of a pale greenish hue. Against this vivid background, the house showed almost black; it lay in shadow, silent, inanimate, funereal. To the Colonel, in his despondency, it was as though its inmates had already departed, taking away with them its soul. The impression was heightened by the contrast between its sombre tones and the brightness of the scene all about it. The fading afterglow still lingered on the lawn, the fields, the distant woods, gay with autumn colours, which encircled the great expanse of cultivated land.

Smothering a cry of anguish, the broken-hearted man rode slowly down the lane. The drooping branches of the elms swayed dolorously above him as he passed. His old pointer, crouching on the front verandah, whined with irritating persistence as he dismounted at the door.

Anxious to hide his distress from the other members of the family, he hastened to the library. Here, he paced the floor for some time, struggling hard to regain his composure. Now and then, he glanced out of the window at the graveyard. How quiet and peaceful it looked! Ah, if he were only lying there! Even Edgar would not begrudge him his six feet of earth, the only bit of the soil so dear to him that he could now call his own. He was a failure: the conviction forced itself upon him, despite his strenuous efforts to find excuses for himself. How could he bear the revelation of the fact to others? He had been a man of so much consequence; a man to whom everybody deferred. People, now, might justly say he had been a humbug all along—a vain, weak creature who deserved all he got. His importance had collapsed like an air bubble. He was of no earthly use; he would only be a drag upon the family, henceforth. His mother's dower was secure; he could trust her to take care of his wife and daughter. It would be impossible for him to live upon her money. Yes, it would be well for all of them if he were dead. They would grieve at first, but after awhile, they would be consoled by the thought that it was better for him than to live on, a broken, disgraced man, a shuffling old beggar!

The Colonel shuddered, and hastening to a brass-mounted cabinet, he took from it a case of duelling pistols. Lifting one of them, he balanced it in his hand, examining it curiously. They were weapons, handed down from father to son, which had served the family well in many a crisis when its honour was in peril. Were they about to do their last duty now? Yes, it was a solution of everything. There could be no exposure after this. His brother, too, would be saved from the obloquy he must otherwise bring upon himself, and therefore, upon the family name. How easy and simple it seemed! A ball in the temple from this gleaming

barrel, and he would be at rest. Whatever might have been his follies, death would wipe them out.

There was a click of the door-latch, and Lydia entered the room. At sight of the pistol, she sprang to her father's side, with a cry of alarm.

"What is the matter, Papa?" she demanded, anxiously.

She had no suspicion of what was passing in his mind, but imagined some danger threatened him. Or perhaps, he was thinking again of going South. He had seemed very restless, of late, and she had secretly rejoiced at a severe attack of gout which had made it impossible for him to travel. Even her mother's influence, she feared, might not be sufficient to restrain him much longer.

"There is nothing the matter, little girl," said the Colonel, trying to look careless. He placed the pistols on a table before him, as he spoke. "I merely wished to see if these were in order."

"Ah, I know!" she exclaimed, shaking a finger at him playfully, though her heart was full. "You were thinking of stealing away from us. It won't do, Papa: we need you here. How could we possibly get along without you?"

Her words would have seemed to him almost ironical a moment before; now, they suffused his heart with love and hope. His "little girl" would stand by him, whatever happened. *She* would never reproach him by even so much as a glance. Her love, he knew, was staunch, undoubting. For her, he would still be what he had always been. And the others, too, his wife, his mother—how could he have imagined that his death would be a gain to them? Lydia was right. They needed him because they loved him. Was he a coward to desert them? No! For their sakes, he must live, and bear.

"I won't 'steal away,' my darling," he said, with a wistful

smile. "You were right; I *was* thinking of it. But the temptation has passed. I promise to remain."

"It's hard for you, I know, Papa," said Lydia, twining her arms about him and kissing him fondly. "Oh, thank you so much!"

Without knowing it, she was thanking him for consenting to live. Unconsciously, she had, perhaps, saved his life. Had she entered but a moment later, she might have found him stretched upon the floor, the smoking pistol clenched in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Colonel and Lydia left the library together. In the hall, they met Ole Miss. She had heard of the Colonel's return and was seeking him to learn the particulars of Edgar's purchase of the farm.

"He really succeeded in buying it for Turlo?" she exclaimed.

The Colonel was anxious to spare her. He resolved to put the best possible construction upon Edgar's conduct, to affect even to regard it as justifiable and almost reasonable. It would hurt her, no matter how much he tried to soften it. There was no escape from the fact that Edgar had acted disingenuously, to say the least. But if possible, he must hide from her the full extent of his treachery—she was so fond of him.

"Yes, he bought it," he said hesitatingly, "but he seems to think he'd better keep it. He is doubtful whether Turlo is fit to manage it."

"What has that to do with it?" demanded Ole Miss, brusquely. "It's Turlo's property: of course, the confiscation has no validity for us. Edgar may advise him, but keep it from him—why, what do you mean?"

"Edgar is the actual owner," the Colonel replied, evasively. "It seems people have convinced him that Turlo is wild and —and unreliable."

"And you assented?" There was a touch of temper in Ole Miss's voice. "I'm surprised at both of you, Robert—at Edgar for suggesting such a thing, and you for permitting your son to be set aside because of gossip. Turlo *is* wild, but so was Edgar, himself, years ago. Time will cure that,

in the one case as in the other. If Edgar thinks Turlo is unfit to manage his own property, he may take it into his head he ought not to have the Manor."

"He has said so," remarked the Colonel, quietly. He saw his task might be difficult and nerved himself to seem composed. It would not do to let his mother suspect his agitation. "I can't deny the Manor would be safer in Edgar's hands," he added.

Ole Miss gazed at him in bewilderment. Was he in earnest?

"And after Edgar, what?" she asked, incredulously. "Does he mean to leave the Manor to Judith—a woman?"

"He talks of marrying," said the Colonel.

"Good Heavens!" cried Ole Miss, thunderstruck. "What, then, is to become of you?"

"I don't know." The Colonel looked away from her guiltily. He knew if he met her searching glance, she would read his secret. "I haven't yet decided what I shall do."

"This is folly," she said, drawing a quick breath. "You must have misunderstood him. He could never have meant he would take the Manor from you. No doubt, he spoke hastily, under a false impression about Turlo."

"I thought so at first, but he soon convinced me he had made up his mind."

Strong though she was, the old lady began to tremble, and her eyes filled with tears. If this were true, Edgar must be demented. Dispossess his brother? Why that would be to break up the family, to put them out of doors! And if he really meant to keep Turlo's farm, he would deprive them of their only refuge. It was too horrible for belief. There must be some explanation which would at least be plausible. How absurd of Edgar, at his age, to think of marrying again! It was evident there was something wrong with him. She would see him as soon as possible; the matter must be

cleared up at once. If his mind was really unhinged, the sooner he was placed under medical treatment, the better. Unless he were taken in hand without delay, some catastrophe might happen.

"Where is Edgar?" she asked abruptly.

"I left him on the road; he has probably gone home."

"Tell Cæsar to get the carriage for me; I shall go and see him."

The Colonel saw that he must be more explicit. An interview between his mother and Edgar, in his present temper, might be disastrous. He could hardly fail to reveal his true character to her. The horror of such a discovery might be too much for her. It was still possible to hide a part of the truth, provided he could dissuade her. But he did not wish Lydia to hear what might pass between them. He meant to take the blame upon himself, as far as he could, and thus to shield Edgar. He must shield him, at any cost, for his mother's sake. It would not hurt her so much to learn of *his* folly; at worst, it was not disgraceful, nor would it come to her as a shock. No doubt, she had seen it all along. Besides, she had never loved him as she loved Edgar. But it was enough to invite her condemnation; he could not bear to humiliate himself before his child.

"Go to your mother, my dear," he said, turning to her and laying a hand caressingly upon her shoulder. "Tell her what I've said, as gently as you can. I'll come up presently and explain all to her. It mustn't be broken to her suddenly, and I'm afraid she might hear it from some one else who wouldn't be so careful as you are sure to be."

Lydia's eyes were brave, though wet with tears. She divined the truth; her father was ruined! A sudden terror chilled her. Was that why he had taken the pistol from its case? No, no! She wouldn't permit herself to harbour the dreadful thought. He loved them all too much for that.

"I've reached the end, Mother," the Colonel said slowly, when Lydia had left them. He handed her a chair, and the old lady sank down into it mechanically, watching him the while with wide-open, anxious eyes.

"The fact is," he continued, with a sudden gulp, "I've mismanaged things, somehow. Edgar regards himself as a kind of trustee for the family. He thinks he ought to take the Manor and start afresh. It may seem a little hard, but it's reasonable enough, from his point of view. And you know, it is what has been done in other families. It isn't the first time one branch has been set aside for another and a stronger. Edgar says, and very justly, that he was thrust out for me; that I had my chance, and he has proved himself more capable."

Ole Miss gave a low moan. The truth burst upon her. Edgar was selfish, cruel, perfidious, and Robert was pleading for him. Why? To spare her, of course. Edgar had lied to her—that was evident. He had been deceiving her throughout. She had thought his father hard on him; he had been only just. Yes, he had been more clear-sighted than she. Her maternal weakness had misled her. She had wasted her fondness on the son who was unworthy, and had given only what was left to the son who, whatever his faults might be, had never failed in tenderness to her and had always shown himself to be a genuine, upright man. Her heart smote her as she saw him standing there before her, with bowed head, as if awaiting her verdict. No doubt, she had always seemed cold to him, this noble-hearted son who thus abased himself in order that she might not suffer. It hurt her to think he could imagine she would be only too ready to find excuses for her favourite, Edgar, and to accept his suggestion that he, Robert, was chiefly to blame.

"Robert!" she cried, rising hastily and stretching out her arms. He sprang towards her, startled, and she hugged him

to her breast with a swift, protecting gesture, as though he were a child again whom she must shield, and petted him fondly, with trembling hands.

He understood her: there was no need for further words. She knew the truth he had tried so hard to hide. For the first time, he felt that her love flowed out to him in full, impetuous current. It gave him a new sense of dignity, of courage. Misfortune had brought him the blessing he had so often craved. Her tone, as she uttered the one word "Robert," had told him he was now her only son.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Colonel had another ordeal before him. He must confess his shortcomings to his wife. He had no fear of reproaches from her. She had always deferred to him with a mute, unquestioning regard; a timid humility. He might not have been so self-confident in the past had she been at all assertive or critical. Even the most modest of men may become conceited if they are dieted constantly on a woman's homage. It was all the harder for him to make a clean breast of it now that he knew his wife had placed an absurdly high estimate upon him. He must destroy her illusion and make her suffer. For years, it had been his constant care to humour her fancies, to guard her against the smallest anxiety, to suppress every possible cause of agitation or worry. On the other hand, he could not bear to be any longer the object of her unsuspecting flattery. It seemed impossible for him to take her hand in his, to look into her eyes, to accept her fond caresses, knowing himself, as he appeared to her, to be a sham.

He entered her room on tiptoe, as was his habit. She had a nervous dread of noises, and the Colonel had trained himself to move softly in her presence; to moderate his usually loud, hearty tones; to steer carefully about among the furniture in the nearly always darkened chamber. He invariably muttered an oath beneath his breath at his clumsiness whenever, by any mischance, he knocked over some object or stumbled against a chair.

He found his wife half buried among cushions in a great easy chair before a bright open fire. Lydia, seated at her

side, was holding one of her hands. Mrs. Cheston was pressing the other convulsively against her heart. Her face was tense with fear; her dark eyes alert and strangely bright, like those of a hunted animal. As her husband entered, she shuddered and glanced at him quickly, with an apprehensive look. Lydia, on seeing her father, disengaged her hand and stole away. She fancied they would wish to be alone. The Colonel took the seat she had occupied, and drew it closer to his wife.

"Lydia tells me Edgar means to take the Manor from you," said Mrs. Cheston, faintly.

"Yes—I'm afraid he will."

"I knew he would."

Her voice was scarcely above a whisper. The words were uttered slowly, hesitatingly, but with a certain emphasis, as though to convince her husband.

The Colonel gazed at her in surprise. How had she known? No one else had suspected Edgar's intention, nor had she ever hinted such an idea to him.

"You did wrong to trust him," she added. "You were always too confiding."

The Colonel rubbed his eyes. Was he awake or dreaming? It seemed she *could* find some fault in him.

"Edgar is so different from you," she continued, wearily. "Of course, you couldn't understand him. He moved in the dark—you, in the open. He meant to have the Manor, all along. Besides, he has hated you for years. I ought to have warned you, but I hoped he'd never return. When he did come, I was afraid."

She turned her head away from him, and gazed fixedly into the fire.

"But why should he hate me?" asked the Colonel, his curiosity getting the better, for the moment, of his wonder at her revelations.

"Because he thought you induced your father to disinherit him in your favour."

"How absurd!" cried the Colonel, almost angrily. "You know I didn't want to take the place; that I consented only from a sense of duty and because Edgar had behaved—well, rather badly."

"Yes, I know, but Edgar doesn't. He really thinks he has a grievance against you. He has said, I believe, that there was a conspiracy to ruin him with your father. Someone undoubtedly exposed him to the Judge. He thinks it was you—or some one in your interest."

"But this is too much!" exclaimed the Colonel. "I can understand his feeling sore against me for a time, but to charge me with stealing the Manor from him! And in such an underhand way. As if I *could* have said anything to father against him behind his back. Nothing could have tempted me to hold the Manor with such a cloud on my title: he ought to know that."

"He couldn't believe it; such scruples would be incomprehensible to him."

There was a bitterness in her tone which should have caught the Colonel's attention, but he was absorbed by his thoughts. He understood, now, the springs of Edgar's actions, which had seemed so inexplicable. He had denounced his brother to himself as a scoundrel; it seemed that Edgar thought much the same of him!

"But how did you discover all this?" His tone was merely inquisitive; it was evident he saw nothing suspicious in the fact that she was so surprisingly well informed. "You must have found it out quite recently; otherwise, you would have told me. You would never have permitted me to rest under so base an imputation."

"I'm not so sure," she answered, with a flicker of spirit. "I knew the charge was groundless. No one who knew you

could attach the least importance to it. It would have hurt you to hear it and you'd have been capable of offering to give up the Manor. Now, it doesn't matter: I felt I ought to make the situation clear to you."

"Give up the Manor? Of course, I'd have given it up!"

"To a man like Edgar? Yes—I believe you would. You never stop to think of consequences when your pride is involved, or you fancy honour calls you. You would strip yourself of everything in a sudden impulse of generosity. I don't believe there was ever a man so blind to his own interests, so rashly improvident, so nobly unselfish. That is why I adore you, Robert!"

The Colonel stared at her, amazed. He forgot she had not yet answered his question. It was immaterial to him, now, as to how she had gained her knowledge of Edgar's opinions. He could think only of the astonishing fact that she had not loved him ignorantly, after all, but had known him better than he had known himself. And she loved him —so she had said—because of her knowledge. The very weaknesses with which he had reproached himself as the cause of their ruin had actually endeared him to her. What a strange puzzle women were! He drew a long breath of relief. He would have no confession to make to her. Deeply moved, he leaned over suddenly, to kiss her.

"Don't!" she cried, shrinking away from him with a look of distress, almost of terror.

He sprang up alarmed, fearing she was about to have a spasm. He saw she was trembling like a leaf.

"Leave me," she murmured, sitting bolt upright and clutching the arms of the chair, "please leave me, at once!"

The Colonel, hardly knowing what to do, called out "Phyllis!" Perhaps she would be able to help him.

The mulatto, who was suspiciously near—she had, in fact, been listening at the door—entered noiselessly from the adjoining room.

"Shall I send for the Doctor?" asked the Colonel, in an anxious whisper, drawing her aside. Mrs. Cheston followed them suspiciously with her eyes; what were they whispering about?

"No, sah," answered Phyllis, "jes' leave her alone wid me; I'll fetch her roun'."

The Colonel, always obedient to his wife's slightest wish, hurried from the room, but did not go far. Outside in the hall, he paced up and down restlessly, awaiting a reassuring word from Phyllis.

"My God, what shall I do?" groaned Mrs. Cheston, covering her face with her hands. "I *can't* tell him!"

"What ails yer?" asked Phyllis, almost roughly. She knew well enough. Had she watched her mistress, year after year, for nothing? How often she had seen her writhe under her husband's unsuspecting tenderness, stung by the desire to confess her guilt towards him, and forced by the fear of consequences to suppress it! Had the time come at last? Phyllis feared she might still hesitate; she longed to choke her into confession. She wanted but one thing, now—the exquisite vengeance of seeing her mistress, this delicate fine lady whom she hated with the gathering bitterness of years of subjection to her petulant whims, her capricious tyranny, humiliate herself before the man who believed her to be a kind of saint, in spite of her frequent fits of temper, as Phyllis chose to regard her seizures.

"I'm afraid of him," answered Mrs. Cheston, with a shiver.

Phyllis gave a slight start; there was a gleam of fierce joy in her sombre eyes. Miss Flor' had never shown the slightest inclination to confide in her. On the contrary, she had

always held her at a distance, jealously guarding herself against betrayal. It was evident she was desperate.

"Who? Marster?" she asked, with insidious softness. "Why he wouldn't hurt nobody—least uv all you."

"He'd never forgive me."

"You want ter tell him somethin'?" Phyllis's voice was almost purring. If she could only beguile her into doing it! It were almost too much to hope that she might have a hand in bringing about the exposure. She had often racked her brain, of late, for some means of enlightening the Colonel. Marse Edgar had disappointed her. For some reason, he seemed inclined to keep his brother in the dark about his wife. But Marster must know. She could not bear the thought of being cheated of the special vengeance she had cherished for herself. Was not this her opportunity? To make her mistress the means of her own undoing by leading her gently up to the point of betraying herself—that would be grand! She waited in breathless suspense.

"It is killing me," groaned Mrs. Cheston. "I've had to bear it all alone so many years."

"Tell him, then," said Phyllis, encouragingly. "Git it off'n yo' mind. Whatever it is, it kain't be enny wuss than what you're sufferin' now. En' you'd breathe easier, en' mebbe, sleep."

"He'd despise me—I couldn't stand that. You don't know, Phyllis. If you did, you wouldn't urge me."

"Mebbe not." There was a ring of irony in her voice, though she strove hard to make it tender. "But, mistus, he might find out fur hisse'f. As he left me, he whispered, 'She's actin' very quarely, Phyllis.' He's thinkin' about you, Marster is. It would be harder still fur you ef some one else tole him." A devilish thought came suddenly to her. Bending close to her mistress, she muttered in her ear, "He's close outside de do'; p'r'aps, he's heerd you."

Mrs. Cheston leaped to her feet, white as death, and fixed her eyes in terror on the door.

"You are right," she exclaimed, breathlessly. "Bring him to me. I mustn't lose a moment. If he is to hear it, he must hear it from me—and at once. I thought there couldn't be anything worse than for me to tell him—but there is; it would be to have him suspect me."

Phyllis turned away from her quickly. She was just in time to hide the exultation in her face. The thing was as good as done.

"Marster!" she cried, in a choking voice. The Colonel hurried into the room as she left it only to hide behind the nearest door.

"You are better, my dear," he said cheerily, rejoiced to find his wife standing.

She did not answer him, but burst forth impetuously, in a loud, harsh voice, fearful lest her resolution fail:

"It was I who told your father! I loved Edgar; he professed to love me, and I learned his secrets. He jilted me for Judith Magruder. I married you from pique, ambition, what you will—and then exposed him so that you might have the Manor. Cast me off if you will—I deserve it. But know this—I soon learned to love you. That is why I couldn't tell you. It has eaten into my heart—this dreadful secret. Even now, I couldn't have told you, if I hadn't feared you might have begun to suspect."

The Colonel was stunned; but only for a moment. He fancied he understood—his wife was overwrought; it was an hallucination that had suddenly seized her. He glanced at her pityingly, his eyes full of love, reproaching himself for having excited her. Mrs. Cheston was so sure of his condemnation that she waited only for some exclamation of anger or of scorn. He said nothing, being so bewildered, at first, that he did not know what to say. The suspense was

too much for her. She swayed suddenly, and would have fallen, had he not thrown his arms about her.

"There, my dear," he said gently, as he let her sink into her chair, "rest quiet for awhile. You mustn't bother your head with such fancies."

"You don't believe me?" she gasped. "It's all true—every word!"

"And if it were," he asked, taking both her hands in his and pressing them, "what difference would that make? It happened years ago. I knew you cared for Edgar—when you were a mere girl. It was wrong of you to tell father without consulting me, but—I understand. Now listen to me: I'm sure you really loved me, from the first. It may be conceit in me"—he smiled, a trifle sadly—"but you've given me cause enough to be vain. No wife could have been more of a flatterer! Do you suppose I'm so ungrateful as to forget all that? It's impossible for me to doubt your love, and isn't that sufficient for me? Edgar has hurt us enough; don't let him come between us, at this late day. Why, we're almost an old couple, my dear! And we have trouble to face together." He stooped again to kiss her, and this time, she did not shrink from him. Phyllis was right, she said to herself, with a great sigh of thankfulness: she breathed easily, now; she might be able to sleep! Her husband's arms were supporting her; her tired head rested on his shoulder. "I always knew you were good," she whispered timidly, "but I—I little dreamed how good—how generous."

He was not generous in the least, the Colonel said to himself; it was easy for him to do what he had done, for he was still quite sure she had exaggerated her fault. Besides, if she had sinned, she had suffered, and—he loved her.

Phyllis had heard every word, and knew that her daring ruse had failed. It had served only to bring husband and wife closer together, to make her mistress happy! She had

been baffled, after all, by Marster's softness. Grinding her teeth in fury, she shook her clenched fist at the unconscious Colonel.

"Oh, you fool, you idjit!" she hissed, "you ought ter tromple her!"

CHAPTER XXXV

THERE was a solemn consultation that evening between Miss Twiggs and Mr. Plunkett, in a corner of the hall, after tea. They had heard from Ole Miss of the disaster that had overtaken the Colonel, and both being pensioners on his bounty, they had been drawn together by mutual recognition of the fact that they ought to take some action. Neither liked the other, and only the sense of their common status in the household, could have brought them into any possible sympathy or co-operation. Miss Twiggs, who was usually mild in her judgments, had long ago reluctantly come to the conclusion that Mr. Plunkett was a selfish, cynical, mischief-making old bachelor, whose only utility was that of discipline for one's patience. Mr. Plunkett anathematised Miss Twiggs as a silly old maid who couldn't even play a game of chess without bothering him with absurdly irrelevant questions. They never quarrelled openly, but they often sparred at each other with more or less malice.

Each was now intensely curious as to what the other meant to do. If Miss Twiggs deemed it to be her duty to leave the Manor, Mr. Plunkett was afraid he, too, would have to go. It would hardly be decent of him not to make the offer. She was so infernally conscientious—that woman! It wouldn't really make any difference whether either of them left or not. They couldn't help the Colonel by doing so. He had lost the Manor, anyhow. The whole family, except, perhaps, Ole Miss, would have to vacate after the sale which seemed inevitable. In the meantime, what did it matter if there were one or two mouths less to

feed? For his part, he hated the idea of giving up his snug berth until the very last minute. Miss Twiggs was curious for a different reason. She was wondering whether Mr. Plunkett were capable of the smallest scrap of generosity. As for herself, she had fully made up her mind as to her course of action. Not only would she instantly relieve the family of the burden of supporting her, slight though it was, but all she had in the world she would place at the Colonel's disposal. It wasn't much, but it might help. As to her own future, that was nothing. She had been blessed with many years of happiness and tender affection at the Manor; if she could give ever so little in return, it would be easy to suffer any privation. If no one would take her in or give her work, well—there was the almshouse. She had often visited it with Ole Miss, who was one of the managers. It was by no means a bad place. On the contrary, it had points in its favour. It had once been the home of a wealthy family, and was a great brick mansion, in the midst of a fine grove of trees, with a pleasant view of the river. The rooms were large and airy, and so clean. She might be very comfortable there. Disgrace? It *would* be hard to be treated as a pauper, but what mattered even that, if she could help those who had been so good to her, in their hour of distress?

No; she had no serious concern for herself, but she was nervously anxious about Mr. Plunkett. Could he be induced to do the proper thing, or would he simply draw into the shell of his selfishness and wound the Colonel by his ingratitude? She had an inspiration that frightened her, at first. The zeal of the missionary was born in her. What a fine stroke it would be to convert him to her way of thinking, to persuade him to add his hoard to hers! She knew he had a small annuity, and he must have saved nearly all of it, for no one had ever known him to spend anything considerable;

his parsimony was proverbial. His clothes, his cigars, his medicines—everything he needed—were supplied by the Colonel. Even his doctor's bills were included in the family account. Besides, he need have no fear of the future ; he had plenty of relatives and friends who would feel it to be their duty, if not their pleasure, to care for him. But it was a formidable undertaking to make him see things as she saw them. He had so little sentiment. Ah, if she but knew how to reach him ! It was so unfortunate he didn't like her, and was accustomed to sneer at her opinions. She wished, now, she had made some effort to ingratiate herself with him, to humour his prejudices. People would have talked, to be sure, and they might even have laughed at her for setting her cap at him. Nothing was more trying to her than to be teased in that way—she had always been painfully modest, shrinking sensitively from any but the most formal contact with the ruder sex—but she could have borne that, also, had she but known what was to happen.

The conversation did not begin auspiciously. At first, Mr. Plunkett seemed to be engrossed with the probable effect of the catastrophe upon his own fortunes, and to commiserate himself far more than the Colonel.

"You'll stay till after the sale," he said, eyeing her sternly. He wished to anticipate any possible suggestions from her. He had an idea he could cow her into acquiescence if he took strong ground at the outset—she was such a weak, fluttering creature !

The crisis was upon her. Miss Twiggs drew herself up stiffly, feeling very nervous.

"No ; I shall leave to-morrow."

"But that's nonsense !" he said, tartly. Her prompt answer was altogether too decided. What if she should prove obstinate ? Weak people sometimes were. "It won't make the least difference to them."

"But it makes a great deal of difference to me." There was a faint touch of colour in her withered cheeks, and her bunches of corkscrew curls trembled perceptibly. "Do you think I could eat their bread another day after knowing they're ruined?"

"I don't see why you should look at it in that way," he said, sullenly. "At any rate, you needn't be so cock-sure about it!"

"Of course, you don't think of staying?"

She was actually forcing his hand. Her temerity surprised her. Perhaps, after all, she was not such a coward as she had feared.

Mr. Plunkett gave a little gasp. Her question seemed to him audacious. He tried to parry the blow, but she followed it up with a dash and energy that quite took his breath away.

"They've been so kind to us," she exclaimed, eagerly. "Neither you nor I could do less than show our anxiety not to be a tax upon them. You see that, don't you? We ought to do more; we ought to help them."

"Help them? How?" he demanded, wondering what she could be driving at.

"With every penny we can scrape together." She had taken the dreaded leap, and felt quite elated. "I've put by some money—thanks to their generosity. You must have done the same thing. All these years, we have lived here—comfortable, well cared for, happy. Who knows? If we give him our savings, perhaps they may enable the Colonel to tide over the difficulty. At least, we would have done all we could. Do they not deserve it of us?"

Mr. Plunkett was inclined to pinch himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming. Was the woman daft? Give up his carefully hoarded savings—money he had accumulated, dollar by dollar, with infinite pains and labour, as a modest provision for his old age? And she? Could she be in

earnest in proposing to beggar herself, now, when she was about to be cast out upon the world? What folly! He ought, perhaps, to oppose her for her own sake—but that was not so important. What concerned him was that her rashness would compromise him. The Colonel might think he ought to imitate her, or at least, would expect some kind of offer. Hang the idiot! He had always known she was foolish, but he had never imagined her freaks would have any grave significance for him. But this was serious. He couldn't afford to have the Colonel think him ungrateful or mean, and he might seem to be both by contrast with Miss Twiggs, if she persisted in her purpose.

It was in her power to put him in an awkward position, not only with the Colonel, but before the whole community. By ignoring the claim upon him which she had so unexpectedly threatened to create by her example, he might damage himself irretrievably in the estimation of those whose good opinion he valued, more or less, and expose himself to rebuffs from the persons whom he counted upon to offer him hospitality. He had always flattered himself that he was a privileged character; a person whose opinions carried weight; a recognised authority upon questions of propriety. He shrank from the prospect of being suddenly deposed, of becoming himself the subject of the kind of comment and criticism he had always bestowed so freely, with the smug satisfaction of feeling himself exempt from reprisal. There were plenty of people who would be only too glad to pounce upon him. Oh, no; he couldn't stand that!

But perhaps, he could dissuade her. He saw she must be managed cautiously; it was evident she had wrought herself up to the pitch of hysterical enthusiasm. It wouldn't do to oppose her openly.

"Your suggestion does you honour," he said, mildly. It was desperately hard for him to control himself, to take an

indulgent tone with her ; he wished he could snub her, as he had so often done, and brush her aside as wholly inconsequential. "I'd be glad to join you if I thought it were any use. What we could offer the Colonel would be merely a drop in the bucket. It wouldn't affect the result one way or the other."

Miss Twiggs glanced at him almost gratefully. He was not unimpressionable! She had expected him to scout her proposal; he actually seemed to think it not unreasonable.

"You miss the point," she said, insistently. It was something new for her to be pertinacious ; she was conscious of a certain enjoyment of the novel sensation. "We don't know yet that our help would be useless ; we ought at least to make the effort. Besides, you forget if the Colonel has to leave the Manor, he may be penniless. Don't you see that even a comparatively small sum of money might, in that event, be of great importance to him? It would save him from the humiliation of having to apply to his friends."

Mr. Plunkett squirmed. She was forcing him from his last position !

"He wouldn't take it," he muttered, desperately.

"That's for him to decide. He ought to take it because, after all, it's partly his. How could we ever have saved the greater portion of it but for his liberality ? No two people in all the world have a better right to ask it of him. It ought to be easier for him to accept it from us than to borrow, knowing he no longer has any security to offer. He has always shared freely with us ; how can he refuse us the privilege of sharing with him ? It's clear to you, now, is it not ? "

Yes, it was altogether too clear. Mr. Plunkett was conscious of a sudden feeling of embarrassment. If he refused, she would despise him. Her opinions had always been a

matter of indifference to him, but now— After all, the risk was not great. He was almost sure the Colonel would decline such an offer. He was not the sort of man to take back what he had given—especially when it was the little all of two dependents. Miss Twiggs was palpably bent on doing the thing; if he held off, she was capable of making a fuss about it and tattling to his discredit.

"Have your way," he growled, "I'm ready."

Miss Twiggs gave a muffled cry of delight. She had actually won!

"Oh, thank you so much!" she exclaimed, effusively. What a victory for her! Glancing towards the other end of the hall, she saw the Colonel seated at a table, his hands resting idly on the arms of his chair, his head bowed; he was apparently lost in thought. This was their opportunity, Miss Twiggs decided. She rose trembling, her heart beating fast.

"Shall we speak to him, now?" she asked. "It would be better if we went together."

"No; you go first," said Mr. Plunkett roughly, "it's your doing!"

It would be some satisfaction for him to make her bear the brunt of the interview. Besides, the Colonel's answer to her would post him as to what he must do. If he assented, there would be no escape; if he refused, he might repeat Miss Twiggs's offer with the pleasant sense of impunity, and even urge it upon him.

Miss Twiggs gazed at him in dismay; she dreaded to approach the Colonel alone; it would have been so much easier with Mr. Plunkett as an auxiliary. But in spite of his refusal, she did not falter. She would dare anything—she who had always been so timid.

"Very well," she quavered, and turning away from him, she started on her errand.

The Colonel looked up at the sound of her rustling skirts.

"Ah, Miss Twiggs," he said kindly, rising to give her a chair, "you know what has happened?"

"Yes," she said, dropping unconsciously into the chair, and picking nervously at some flounces on her dress. "I wish to beg a great favour of you."

"What is it?" he asked, considerately. He was thinking sadly, it was no longer in his power to grant favours.

Miss Twiggs hesitated. How would he take it? Would he be offended?

"I—I have saved a little money," she stammered, confusedly. "Would you mind accepting it as—as a loan? I thought it might be of some help to you in your trouble."

The Colonel's eyes kindled. This weak, helpless creature was offering him her all!

"My dear Miss Twiggs," he said, taking both her hands in his and pressing them warmly, "I always knew you loved us; if I could have doubted your devotion, it would be clear to me now. I can't take your money—yet. It wouldn't help me, I assure you. But after the sale, I may need a little—at first. If I do, I promise to call upon you. Will that do?"

He knew he was really conferring a favour, and not a small one, either, in her eyes. She showed in her agitation the sense of what it must cost him to consent to take money from her.

She rose, supremely happy, yet anxious to get away. The less she said the better—a little more, and she would have burst into tears: they understood each other; that was enough.

"It will have to do," she said reluctantly, as she turned away, "but I wish you'd take it now."

The Colonel bowed, and made no answer. What she wished was out of the question, of course; he would

never touch a penny of her pittance, if he could help it. On the other hand, he had given his word; if reduced to extremities, he would compel himself to apply to her. It would be hard, but not so hard as to solicit aid from others, now that he had no means of repaying. It would make her proud and happy—he could be quite sure of that.

Mr. Plunkett was greatly provoked when he saw Miss Twiggs flit suddenly away without returning to tell him what the Colonel had said. They had spoken in lowered tones, and he had been unable to catch a single word. What did she mean by leaving him in the lurch in this way? Oh, of course—he might have expected it—she had broken down and made a mess of it. Her nerve had failed her at the critical moment. Yet, he wasn't sure; she might have gone through with it. Had the Colonel accepted or refused? Well, he must take his chances. If Miss Twiggs hadn't made the offer, she would do it sooner or later. In the meantime, he would reap all the greater credit if he were the first to broach the subject.

The Colonel, who was about to retire to his bedroom, looked round in some surprise, as his brother-in-law approached. He saw at once that Mr. Plunkett was greatly disturbed. He waited, wondering whether Josias was going to reproach him; he was capable of it.

"A word with you, Robert," he said, in a quick, jerky tone. "Is it true you're in danger of losing the Manor?"

"I'm afraid there's no doubt about it," answered the Colonel, patiently. Of course, Josias, who was frankly selfish, was thinking only of the discomfort he would have to suffer; after awhile, no doubt he would feel more or less sympathy for the other members of the family.

"Well," said Mr. Plunkett, hesitating a moment, and with a very wry face, "I want you to know I shan't be an expense to you any longer. God knows what will become of

me." There was a plaintiveness in his voice—it was quite unconscious—which confirmed the Colonel's diagnosis. "However, I'll make shift somehow. And—and there's another thing, Robert. I've got a bit of money laid away; if it's of any real use to you, it's—it's yours."

The Colonel gazed at him in blank wonder. His heart smote him. How unjust he had been! He knew very well what it meant to his brother-in-law to part with his money. He had often seen him haggle over a penny, and it was a common practice with him at church, when the collection was being taken up, to insist upon change for a quarter. He was, in fact, a petty miser; his offer, halting though it was, seemed to the Colonel almost heroic.

"You, too, Josias!" the Colonel exclaimed, unconscious that he was expressing a frank incredulity.

Mr. Plunkett knew, now, that Miss Twiggs had spoken. It was evident, however, that the Colonel had no idea he was acting at her suggestion. Now that he had gone so far, he felt better. A glow of real feeling warmed his blood. He was proud of having done what, a little while ago, he would have considered a monstrous piece of folly.

"You've been very kind to me," he blurted out hastily, urged on by a sudden desire to convince the Colonel he was in earnest. "Damn me if I'm going to stand by and see you suffer!"

He was in for it now, sure enough, if the Colonel *should* accept. But no matter! Strange—he was becoming reckless. It was such a new experience for him to be generous, that he had quite lost his head. He had always feared he might become a spendthrift, if he ever let himself go. And here he was, risking everything he had, and finding an almost delirious pleasure in it!

The Colonel was moved even more deeply than by Miss Twiggs' conduct. Such conduct was natural to her, but in

Josias's case, it was abnormal. To Mr. Plunkett's astonishment, he seized him in his arms and hugged him. The next moment, the Colonel was almost tempted to laugh at the look of relief which came over his brother-in-law's face when he told him, as he had told Miss Twiggs, that his money could be of no immediate use to him, and he would apply to him only if he were in actual need. But Mr. Plunkett's evident satisfaction served also to emphasise the seriousness of his proffered sacrifice. To the Colonel, at that moment, there was a whimsical dignity about him, a strange mixture of generosity and thrift which was not ignoble.

Mr. Plunkett said good-night with a warmth unusual to him. He was surprised to learn how much he cared for "Bob." He wished he could find something to say to comfort him, but he was an awkward hand at that sort of thing. How glad he was he had yielded to Miss Twiggs! Nevertheless, he could not quite reconcile himself to the thought that she had vanquished him. "Who'd ever have dreamed," he said to himself, with a last sputter of indignation, "that I'd have to follow *her* lead?" He was compelled to admit that she was neither so weak nor so silly as he had imagined. "There must be something in her, after all," he added, grudgingly. "It's the first time a woman ever got the better of me—but I shan't let her know it. She'd be so set up that she'd want to try her hand again; there's no telling where the thing would end. She might take it into her head to marry me!" He smiled sourly at the idea. Well, he could baffle her there! He wasn't as bad as that; he hadn't *quite* lost his grip.

The Colonel lingered for some minutes after Mr. Plunkett had left him, thinking of all that had happened. What a day he had gone through! At last, it was over; he must think of the morrow. He thought of it calmly, without fear, and even with a certain eagerness—the eagerness of a naturally

courageous soul which, having passed through a crisis of doubt and despondency, emerges stronger, more self-reliant. None of those whom he cared for most had turned from him or reproached him. They still loved and trusted him. The fact, trifling in itself, that even Josias, a chronic fault-finder, had no word of blame, but only sympathy and utterly unlooked-for generosity, stimulated him wonderfully. Well, the old ease and pomp and prodigality were gone; but on the ruins of his fortunes, he might be able to rear, with the aid of loving hands, a fabric of self-respect and independence, which, if modest, would at least be solid and enduring. But a little while ago, he had been chafing at his inaction and longing to go South. How thankful he was he had resisted the temptation! His duty lay here. If God willed, he would fulfil it loyally, whatever happened.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Turlo Cheston and Oswald Reeve had succeeded, without much difficulty, in making their way to Richmond, and had obtained commissions as lieutenants in the same regiment in the Army of Northern Virginia. Since then, they had been close comrades, and had seen hard service together. Their command was in camp at Fredericksburg when a letter reached Turlo from his father, telling him of the confiscation of his farm and of the trouble caused by his uncle's conduct. The Colonel, fearing some rashness on Turlo's part, bade him not to think of returning. "You could do no good here," he wrote, "and your presence might cause further trouble with your uncle. I would have preferred not to worry you with what has happened, as it cannot be mended; but I fear some incorrect version of the facts may reach you, causing you greater anxiety and distress. I have told you, therefore, what has actually occurred. But I must insist that you remain at your post and do your duty. I assure you, you cannot help us."

The Colonel had framed his letter carefully, but the bare recital of the facts was enough to inflame Turlo, naturally hot-headed, to a pitch of violent indignation against his uncle. The hound, to steal his farm from him! And to take the Manor from his father—what a scoundrel he must be! Turlo had but one thought. It was impossible for him, he knew, to get the better of his uncle except by means of physical force. He was much too clever for him, of course. But he had a stout pair of fists. He could punish him bodily, and he longed to do it. It was even possible he might

be able to frighten him; to compel him by threats of violence to desist. How he wished he were at home! It would be something, at least, to know what was going on from day to day, and to do all he could to thwart and embarrass his uncle at every step. He was not over-modest, and it seemed to him the family needed him especially. No one, he persuaded himself, had either the right or the courage to do what he proposed. It was evident his father had lost his nerve.

For several days, Turlo struggled hard with a growing desire to hasten home. He loved his father and did not wish to disobey him; besides, he was a Confederate officer, on active duty, and it seemed a dubious thing to ask for leave to enter the Union lines. His request might expose him to the suspicion of having grown faint-hearted, of wishing to exchange the security of his home for the dangers of the battle-field. He had made a reputation for dash and gallantry, and was boyishly proud of it: his heart was really in the Southern cause. But his curiosity as to what was happening at the Manor, and his longing to have some part in it, at last broke down his power of resistance. He applied for leave, and was refused on the ground that an engagement was imminent and no officer could be spared. At first, he accepted the decision as final, but he soon grew restless again, and at length, conceived the idea of deserting. It wouldn't be really deserting, he persuaded himself. He was not serving from any of the seceding States, but was merely a volunteer from outside. He would leave a letter explaining the reasons that called him away, and promising to return. If they chose to shoot him as a deserter when he presented himself again—well, they might. He was going home.

He confided his intention one night to Oswald Reeve. To his great surprise, Oswald offered to accompany him.

"I'm sick of the whole thing," Oswald explained. "Between you and me, Turlo, I don't care a hang for the Confederacy. I wouldn't have come down here if I hadn't bragged about doing it. Well, I've done it, and I can go back with some credit. They'll never know at home that I deserted. I can easily make up a story about having been captured."

He didn't tell Turlo his real motive. The fact was he, too, had had a letter from his father who told him of the Colonel's plight and urged him to return without delay. "I can't save the Manor for you," he wrote. "At least, it looks as if I had lost it, for good and all. But now's your chance to get the girl. Her father's ruined; of course, she's in low spirits, and would turn to anyone who'd help the family out of their scrape. Besides, you have a claim upon her sympathy you never had before; you've fought for her Cause. It would be something to marry into that family, after all. I'd give the money cheerfully to set up a new establishment. It would be even better for *me* than to own the Manor. They couldn't shove me aside with any kind of decency, knowing I was backing them for a fresh start."

Oswald thought the reasoning shrewd; he was as much in love with Lydia as ever, and eager to make another trial under new conditions distinctly favourable to him. Perhaps, she had changed; misfortune might have tempered those instincts which had made her seem so superior, so antipathetic to him.

Turlo suspected his sister was at the bottom of Oswald's sudden resolution, and good-naturedly consented. He had grown to be very fond of Oswald, and in spite of his prejudices, was even inclined to think Lydia might do worse.

They made their escape from Fredericksburg the following night, and after a series of adventures, succeeded in reaching the banks of the Potomac. They were about to put off

in a skiff for the opposite shore, when a scouting party of Federal troops came suddenly upon them. Turlo managed to dodge them, and ran at top speed up the river, a hail of bullets whizzing past him. Pausing to take breath, he looked round, and saw Oswald in the midst of a uniformed group. He was sorry they had caught him, but perhaps, he would be able to convince them that he had abandoned the Confederate service and was anxious to be reconciled. The best thing he could do for him would be to get home as soon as he could, and inform Oswald's father. If anybody could get him off, it was old Reeve; he was smart enough for anything.

A little farther up the river, Turlo stumbled upon an old negro in a canoe who made no trouble at all about carrying him across, and seemed to think himself well rewarded with a plug of Virginia tobacco. Turlo's troubles did not end, however, with his arrival on Maryland soil. The country was overrun with troops, and he was compelled to travel on foot, at night, with infinite care and precaution. It was unsafe even to apply at houses for food, and he often lay all day in swamps or thickets, tortured by hunger and soaked with rain. His sufferings intensified his feeling against his uncle, and finally, affected his brain. When at last, one night, he reached the Manor, he had become really dangerous; his idea, now, was to kill his uncle. Yes, that would be the easiest, the simplest solution of the matter. His uncle deserved to die; it was his *duty* to kill him. He would rid the whole family of an incubus, and perhaps, save the Manor. Judith was a generous girl, although she had treated him shabbily; no doubt, she would make it easy for his father to regain possession. As to himself, he was indifferent; the thing that was of real importance was to deal effectually with his uncle. Even Judith, he persuaded himself in his madness, would have reason to thank him. Any girl should be

grateful for being freed from such a father. A lunatic, with the homicidal impulse strong upon him, often finds strange reasons to justify it and even to make it seem to him humane. Rational enough, to all appearance, upon any other subject, Turlo was wholly irresponsible when he thought of Edgar. Any one might have talked with him by the hour without discovering that his mind was unhinged.

The Colonel happened to be alone in the library when Turlo tapped on the outer door. He rose and opened it, but drew back, shocked, when his son staggered across the threshold. Turlo presented, indeed, a sorry spectacle. His clothes were in tatters, his face gaunt from famine, his black eyes glowing with the fire of a disordered brain.

"Well, father," he exclaimed, with an unsteady laugh, "aren't you glad to see me? But, for God's sake, a little food!"

The Colonel put an arm about him to support him, and guided him to a chair. Without a word, he hastened to a closet, took out a decanter of brandy, and poured out a stiff dram.

Turlo tossed it off with evident relish.

"The first drop of good liquor in months," he exclaimed. "But it's something to eat I need most."

"In a moment," said the Colonel, hastening away. There was a bright fire in the grate in one corner of the room, and Turlo warmed himself luxuriously before the cheering blaze. The Colonel soon returned with a pitcher of milk and some biscuits.

"I didn't bring you anything else," he explained, "because I thought you ought not to eat much at first."

Turlo crumbled a biscuit in his hand, drank a glass of milk, and sat munching the bread.

"Now tell me what has happened," he said.

"Nothing has happened. Everything is the same as

when I wrote you. I hoped you'd obey me and not come back."

"I couldn't help it, father. It worried me so I had to come."

"I'm surprised they gave you leave."

"They didn't; I left without it."

"You deserted!" cried the Colonel, horrified. "You—*my son!*"

"There wasn't any other way," said Turlo, sullenly. "What's more, I may be arrested as a spy."

The Colonel groaned. His son had dishonoured himself with the Confederates, and had rendered himself liable to even greater ignominy at the hands of the Federal authorities, if he were caught. How bitterly he repented having written to him! It was a crushing load to bear in addition to his other burdens. But he uttered no reproaches. How could he, as he looked at Turlo, half-starved, wild-eyed, evidently ill? He must make the best of it, and seek to keep him out of further trouble.

"You've had a rough road to travel, father," said Turlo, adding with a touch of patronage: "But I'll make it all right soon."

As he spoke, he got up with a kind of swagger, and without asking leave, helped himself to another glass of brandy. The act was unpleasantly significant to the Colonel. Turlo's manner towards him, even in his most reckless moods, had always been respectful. He winced at the thought that his son might have reached the conclusion that he was no longer worthy of deference and had determined to assert himself. Did the foolish boy imagine *he* was competent to take the lead, to supplant him as the head of the family? No; it was doubtless merely an unconscious bit of presumption. Nevertheless, it indicated a self-confidence that might be dangerous.

"You must be careful, Turlo," he said, "the county is full of troops. If the news of your presence here leaks out, we shall have some of them down on us."

"Oh, I'll lie close enough," said Turlo, "all I ask is a chance to meet my uncle."

"Your uncle!" exclaimed the Colonel, alarmed. "My dear boy, it is he who has caused all the trouble: it would only make things worse if you came into contact with him."

"Oh, no," said Turlo, with an ominous glance, "he won't worry you any more, when I am through with him."

The Colonel thought he was merely boasting; no doubt, the brandy had gone to his head.

"You must be dreadfully tired," he said, rising. "Come; we'll go to bed."

He lit a candle, and escorted Turlo upstairs.

"Don't leave the room until Cæsar comes to you in the morning," he urged, as he was about to say good-night, "I'll send him to you in time for breakfast. We can trust him. The others are faithful, but they might chatter. Get a good night's sleep, and we'll talk over matters at our leisure."

He left him, hoping fervently he would be less heady and more reasonable in the morning. Turlo laughed grimly to himself. He would promise anything to keep the old gentleman quiet, but he knew what he meant to do. Yes, he would "lie close," but only to save himself from arrest until he could have it out with his uncle.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Turlo did not awake until late next morning. He found Cæsar at his bedside, grave and attentive.

"Well, old man," he exclaimed, with something of the same air of patronage he had shown his father, "you don't look very jolly. Cheer up; *I've* come home to take things in hand."

"Better stayed whar you wuz," grunted Cæsar, resenting his manner. It was a liberty to take with him, and he didn't mean to put up with it. The idea of Young Marse, whom he had always hectored, trying to put on airs with him! "Whyn't you mind yo' Par?"

"Oh, father isn't any match for Uncle Edgar!"

"En' you think you iz?" demanded Cæsar. "Well, mind how you handles him; he mought cut yo' fingers."

"I won't give him a chance," said Turlo, flinging out of bed. "I know what he wants, and he'll get it."

"What you gwine ter do?" asked Cæsar, suspiciously. He saw that Young Marse was ripe for mischief.

"That's telling," cried Turlo, with a shrewd glance. He wasn't going to give his game away.

Cæsar helped him to dress, and then left him, with a sage shake of the head. He meant to keep an eye on him. He didn't like the way he talked and acted. Something was wrong with Young Marse—he had never behaved so before,—but as yet, he had no suspicion that he was more than "flighty."

Turlo descended to the hall, and there, found Judith. She had just arrived, and for the moment, was alone.

Judith was still a frequent visitor at the Manor. Neither her engagement to Basil nor Edgar's conduct had affected her relations to the family. Lydia was anxious to hide her distress from *her*, above all. She had ceased to be intimate with her, but she was still cordial and even affectionate, for she had brought herself to the point of acquitting Judith of blame, and tried to stifle her jealousy by cultivating the admiration and liking for her which she had felt from the first. As for the other members of the family, they were only drawn to Judith the more by Edgar's treatment of the Colonel. They were sure she was distressed and mortified, and she was clever enough to encourage this impression without seeming to take issue with her father.

Judith drew back, startled, on seeing Turlo. She had not heard of his return—only the Colonel and Cæsar knew of it as yet—and had dismissed him from her mind as a factor in her problem since the day of his departure for the South. She was unpleasantly affected by his sudden appearance on the scene because she knew him to be a rash, impulsive boy, with a grievance against Edgar; but at first, she attached no great importance to it.

"Well, Cousin Judith," he exclaimed, in an ordinary tone, but with frank warmth of manner, and shaking hands with her heartily. "You don't look as if you had suffered much, yet you must have had a hard time."

She looked at him, puzzled. Did he mean to intimate that she had "had a hard time" because of Basil's absence? Yes, he was trying to tease her. It was a rather lame joke, but he had that sort of humour. Well, if he could refer so lightly to her engagement, no doubt he had been cured of his feeling for her. Very probably, he had lost his heart again to some girl in the South. She devoutly hoped he had. It would be very embarrassing, if he had come back to make love to her.

"On the contrary," she said, "I've had a very easy time."

"What!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing suddenly, "with a father like yours?"

The question frightened Judith. What did he know about her "father"? How absurd, she reflected, with a sigh of relief, the next moment, to fancy he could know anything serious! Of course, he was incensed against him for having taken his farm and for threatening to seize the Manor. But it was odd in him to denounce him to her whom he believed to be Edgar Cheston's daughter.

"You shouldn't say anything against him to me," she said rebukingly, feeling she should make some protest.

"Why not?" he demanded, in an argumentative tone. "He has done you far greater wrong than any one else."

"What do you mean?" she gasped, her fears returning.

"I mean that he has given you a blackened name," he answered hotly, "you must suffer because you are his daughter. He's not a gentleman, though he is a Cheston. Don't try to excuse him to me. I know, from what he has done to us, that he must always have been a heavy load for you to carry. Poor girl! You wouldn't admit it, of course, but you'd be better off if he were dead."

Judith recoiled from him in consternation. His words were wild, but every one of them was true, though not in the sense he intended. Without knowing it, he had probed her most secret thoughts. Deep down in her heart, unacknowledged to herself before, lay the wish that Edgar *were* dead, and she were free forever. It was evident Turlo had no suspicion of her reasons for hating Edgar, but he had so accurately defined her attitude towards him that he terrified her. She was struck, for the first time, by his strange excitement. Had he been drinking?

"But you mustn't worry," continued Turlo soothingly,

with a protecting wave of the hand; "I'll soon settle him! That's what I came home for."

"I don't understand——" faltered Judith, more and more alarmed.

"I don't intend you shall—just yet," he said, with a harsh laugh. "Not a word to him!" he added, with sudden fierceness. A gleam of cunning passed swiftly over his face. "I mean to trap him!"

Judith caught her breath. She understood. He harboured some design against Edgar. What it was, she could not imagine; but it was clearly hostile. No; he had not been drinking. She could see that in his eyes, his general bearing. His language, too, was perfectly coherent. He had never seemed to her well-balanced; she had always thought him erratic. No doubt, the wrongs his uncle had done him and his father had worked upon him so that he had become more or less crazed. Yes, that would account for his sudden outburst to her against a man supposed to be her father. No one in his senses would have chosen her for a confidant. But whatever its cause, his mental attitude was a serious menace to Edgar.

What should she do? If she kept silent and any mischief happened to him, Edgar would be enraged against her for not having warned him; in his passion, he might strike at her even yet through Basil. She trembled, too, at the thought that Turlo might suddenly take it into his head to tell what he knew about her. If he were as unsettled as he seemed to be, anything might happen. Yes, it were safer to notify Edgar of his nephew's return and his threats against him. No doubt, he would be able to take instant measures to apprehend him and shut him up where he could do no harm. Perhaps Turlo would gradually cool down and return to his normal condition. She did not imagine aught worse than imprisonment for him.

Instead of returning to the Rectory when she left the Manor, Judith made all haste to reach the county town. She had driven over alone in a phaeton the Rector had bought for her, so she was not embarrassed by any witness of her change of route. It was still early in the afternoon when she arrived at the old brick tavern, on the main street of the village, where Edgar had lodgings.

The tavern was a low, straggling house of red brick, dating from pre-Revolutionary times, in a large enclosure, one side of which was occupied by a long row of stables. A spacious yard, with a few aged locusts whose rough trunks were coated with whitewash, separated the inn from the grassy street. A wide hall opened, on one side, into an old-fashioned kitchen, with the same paraphernalia for cooking as in colonial days, and on the other, into the dining-room. On the floor above there was a ballroom, with a mirror at each end and panelled walls, which had been the scene of gay assemblies during several generations. At the side of it, ran a corridor opening upon a verandah at the back which gave the only means of access to the sleeping rooms. From these, a pleasant view was had of picturesque bits of the town, and the rolling surface of the country beyond. In the old days of stage-coaches, the inn, as one of the chief stopping-places on a main highway long known as "the King's Road," had been the scene of constant bustle and excitement; but with the change to railroads and steamboats, it had sunk into even greater torpor than that which had overtaken the warehouses and shops. Guests were few and infrequent. People seldom remained longer than a night. If they were of any consequence, they were sure to be spirited away by some hospitable planter. It was a duty, as well as a privilege, in his eyes, to entertain a stranger who had social claims.

Edgar had taken three rooms, and had fitted them up to suit his fancy. He was alone when Judith arrived, expecting

Reeve with whom he had made an appointment to consider the final details of the transfer of the mortgages. There had been some delay in obtaining his share of the Magruder money, but at last, he had the amount in hand, and was ready to settle the affair. He rose quickly as Judith entered. He was glad to see her. It was lonesome in these old, mildewed rooms, with not a soul in the tavern whom he could endure. He was almost beginning to regret he had left the Manor, even though it would have been more or less awkward there. In spite of himself, he had yielded somewhat to the infection of the family life. There was a cheery glow in it which he missed. They had really cared for him; there was no one who cared for him now. Even his mother had cut him off. Judith instantly brightened the scene. He found himself wishing she were always beside him.

"Why, this is really a treat——" he began. He stopped short suddenly, at a second glance at her. She seemed nervous; her face was pale and drawn. "What's the matter?" he demanded anxiously, "you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I *have* seen one—or something very like it," she answered, sinking into a chair. "It has frightened me, a little. Did you know Turlo had returned? I had begun to think he was dead—or at least, had passed out of our lives."

"Oh, is that all?" said Edgar, with a confident laugh. "I feared it was something serious. I can easily put a curb upon him."

"I am not so sure of that. He seems to me to be rather formidable. I think his brain is affected. He is set upon doing you some harm."

"Where is he?" Edgar looked thoughtful, but he was not alarmed. He fancied he had ample means of protecting himself. Turlo was a mere boy. It would be easy to outwit him.

"At the Manor. He came last night. I left him half an hour ago, and hurried here to tell you. Can you imagine?—he has the queer fancy that he would do me a favour by ridding me of you; that I would be better off if you were dead." She glanced at Edgar, as she spoke, with a dubious smile which made him uncomfortable. Perhaps, she would not be unwilling to accept his nephew's good offices, if she dared! He could no longer count upon her allegiance which had once been absolute. But he held her still by the bonds of her obvious interest in his silence. She had come to warn him; evidently, she was afraid to round on him—yet.

"I thought we had made peace," he muttered, sullenly.

"So we have," she said, carelessly. "I merely mentioned the fact because it seemed curious. Don't you think it shows he isn't quite sane?"

"Of course; he may be mischievous."

"He is certainly that. He thinks you have treated his father as well as himself inhumanly. I don't know what he intends doing, but it may be something desperate."

"I'll have him taken, at once," said Edgar, hastily. He mused a moment, and added, "He could be arrested as a spy."

"You wouldn't do that!"

"Wouldn't I?" he retorted, grimly. "You don't seem to comprehend. From what you tell me, I've no doubt the fellow is a madman. If he is allowed to remain at large, he might lie in wait and pot me at any moment. If he is arrested, it must be on a serious charge; otherwise, they might let him loose again."

"But they hang spies, do they not?" she asked, anxiously.

"Sometimes," he replied, in an indifferent tone. "Of course, I wouldn't let it come to that; after all, he's my nephew."

She was not so sure he wouldn't. She believed him to be

capable of anything—of murder, even, if his safety were seriously threatened. To have Turlo executed as a spy, would be a final solution which he could easily bring about without compromising himself. She shuddered at her part in the affair. Poor Turlo! Without knowing it, she had brought him, perhaps, into mortal peril. She liked him in spite of the fact that he had annoyed her at times. He had been loyal to her, although she had not used him well. Certainly, he did not deserve this at her hands. She repented having come. "I wouldn't have done it," she murmured to herself," if I had known."

"If you hear anything else," said Edgar, as she rose to go, "you won't fail to let me know?"

"I won't fail," she answered, faintly. She was resolved not to hear. Edgar must shift for himself. If she helped anybody, it would be Turlo.

When she had left him, Edgar looked at his watch. It was within ten minutes of the hour Reeve had named. He began to pace restlessly up and down the room. He was not afraid of Turlo, but he was disturbed. The fool might give him trouble. What were his intentions? Would he remain at the Manor or hide somewhere else? He had neglected to ask Judith, but doubtless, she would have told him, had she known. There was a knock at the door. He called out "Come in," thinking Reeve was ahead of time; but it was Smyrk, the Manor overseer.

"Good-evenin', Mister Edgar," he said, in a whining voice, twiddling his hat, which he held in both hands. "I thought ye mought like ter know the Kurnel's son hed got back. I seed him, unbeknownst, and heern him talk. He's threatenin' bloody murder agin you."

"So I understand," said Edgar, shortly. Smyrk drew back, crestfallen. He had thought himself the bearer of a sensational bit of news.

"What I want to know," continued Edgar, "is what he means to do—whether he will remain at the Manor to-night or seek some other cover."

"I didn't hear him say," answered Smyrk, ruefully.

"You can find out, can't you?" asked Edgar, with an impatient air.

"Ef I hez enny kind o' luck," replied Smyrk, with a cunning glance. "It all depends on whether ole Cæsar's hangin' erbout. Ef he sees me, I kain't git nigh Mr. Turlo. He seems ter be shadderin' him."

"Well, go back and try. If you succeed, come to me at once on the fastest horse in the stable."

"I'll do my bes'," said Smyrk, and with another drawling "Good-evenin'," he slunk away. He had scarcely disappeared when a heavy step sounded on the verandah, and Reeve came hurriedly to Edgar's door. He was evidently perturbed. He scarcely noticed Edgar's curt greeting, but flung himself into a chair and began to mop his face with a red silk handkerchief.

"I want your help," he said, abruptly.

"My help? Why, what's the matter, man?" asked Edgar, glancing at him in surprise.

"My son has been arrested by Union troops in trying to cross the Potomac. He is in great danger; it seems he entered the Union lines without a pass."

"How did you hear that?" asked Edgar, sharply. He knew Oswald had gone South with Turlo and that they had served in the same regiment. His case was suspiciously like Turlo's. Had they come North together?

"Turlo Cheston told me a few minutes ago. The boy's off his head, but his story about Oswald was straight enough. Turlo's afraid of being nabbed as a spy. My son may have rendered himself liable to the same charge, but, of course, it's absurd."

"And Turlo came here, with the town full of troops?"

"Oh, he sneaked in all right. He said he couldn't rest until he had told me about Oswald. God bless him for it! He's a plucky one—that boy."

"Can you lay hands on him?" demanded Edgar. "I must get him into custody at once."

"You wouldn't have me do that!" exclaimed Reeve, horrified. Even his accommodating conscience was shocked. "Didn't I tell you he had just done me a favour—a very great favour? Besides, you can't move against him; he's your brother's son."

"That won't worry me," said Edgar coolly, "our relationship doesn't weigh with *him*. He is threatening me with some kind of violence, I don't know what. It's merely a matter of self-preservation. And it would be a kindness to him to lock him up out of harm's way to himself or others. You say, yourself, he isn't right in his mind."

"He *is* daft about you. I didn't pay much attention to what he said, except about Oswald, but I remember he was bitter against you, and said something about settling scores."

"You want my influence to protect your son, do you not?" asked Edgar. "Well, help me to capture this hot-headed boy."

"I can't," said Reeve, rejoicing at his inability, "he has already left town; by this time, he is well on his way to the Manor."

"He has gone back, then?" said Edgar, disappointed. "I wonder if he means to stay there to-night."

"He told me he would," answered Reeve. "He said he was fagged out and needed another night's rest."

"Then, I have him!" cried Edgar, eagerly. "He'll be a clever fellow to escape me now. Not a word of this, Reeve, to any one. Your son's safety depends upon holding your tongue."

"*I* shan't blab," said the lawyer. He considered a moment. Since he was powerless to help Turlo, he might as well ingratiate himself with Edgar. It was all important to make sure of his aid in behalf of Oswald. "If you've made up your mind to hunt him down," he added, "you'd better be ready to put the screws on the family. Wouldn't it be well to provide yourself with an order for your brother's arrest? That might make them give up Turlo."

"Do you imagine I'm going to the Manor?" asked Edgar, in disgust. What did the fellow take him for—a common ruffian? "I'll leave that to the provost marshal."

"You'd make a mistake," said Reeve, decidedly. "Turlo's not to be easily caught. Of course, all the niggers there are on the watch. If you want the thing done right, you'd better do it yourself. If you shouldn't find him, you might force them to tell you where he is by threatening your brother. They care a good deal more for him than for Turlo."

Edgar looked doubtful for a moment. Reeve's reasoning was good, and he couldn't afford to waste any chances. The situation was really critical. From three different sources, he had heard that Turlo was violently inflamed against him; he was clearly dangerous. Any negligence, now, might cost him his life. But if he accepted Reeve's advice, he must unmask. After directing the arrest in person at the Manor, it would no longer be possible to conceal his employment by the Government. Public opinion would be incensed against him. It would see in his conduct unnatural malice towards his brother. It would be out of the question for him to keep up the fiction of respectability. Henceforth, there would be war between him and the community at large. Well—let it come! He had no choice, if he wished to make sure. Upon the whole, he was glad, since it had to be. He had power, and he would enjoy the free use of it. His authority as a Government agent was, necesssarily, almost

unlimited. He could easily convert it into a means of oppression. If he couldn't make himself respected, he could make himself feared. There was exultation for him in the thought that he could wipe out many an old score. These people had passed sentence of outlawry upon him years ago; he could revenge himself upon them all. It was in his power to tame their pride; to bend the most obstinate to his will; to reach a kind of eminence by treading them under his feet.

"You are right," he said suddenly to Reeve. "I'll see to it myself!"

Reeve left him without the subject of the mortgages having been mentioned. Both had forgotten all about them in the excitement of their interview. The lawyer was well pleased. His scruples about Turlo had utterly vanished. He would have thought them idle in comparison with the promise of Edgar's influence on behalf of his son. He felt no compunction whatever about the Colonel. On the contrary, he relished the thought of the blow to his pride in the discovery of Edgar's political depravity, as he would regard it. "That'll make him bite the dust," he said to himself, with a chuckle, "to find his brother a Yankee informer!" He had also put a spoke in Edgar's wheel. "He'll do for himself about here. Let him have the Manor; for the first time in its history, its master will be an object of general contempt." That suggestion of his was really a clever stroke. Edgar had used him to his own undoing; he had now contrived things so that Edgar would unconsciously minister to his revenge. *He* was safe, in any event. And both these brothers, each of whom, in his own way, had humiliated and baffled him, would be made to suffer precisely what would most hurt their vanity, their family pride. If he had planned it, he couldn't have devised anything better!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

EDGAR had intended to start for the Manor with a detachment of troops at midnight, but as he was about to set out he was summoned to a conference with the military commander of the district who had just received important despatches from Washington. Much to his annoyance, the interview lasted for nearly two hours, and his impatience was heightened when at length upon rejoining the squad of soldiers, he learned that Smyrk had been waiting for some time with the news that Turlo was still at the Manor and had retired for the night. Edgar at once gave the order to move, and though the night was dark, the little band started off at a brisk trot. The road was a winding one, for the greater part of the distance, through a dense wood. At some places, they were forced to check their horses and pick their way cautiously over swampy spots or along the precipitous banks of a stream.

Every member of the party knew the nature of their errand, and as they were residents of the neighbourhood who were aware that Turlo was Edgar's nephew, they thought it rather queer. Still, such things happened. Maryland was a border state, and even in the Tidewater counties, there were sympathisers with both sides among men who had been close friends, and not infrequently, among members of the same family. One of the soldiers had a son in the Confederate army; another had been present at the arrest of his brother, but a few days before, on a charge of disloyalty. Nearly all of them had been detailed from a company of "home guards," recruited mainly from the "poor white" class who had espoused the Union cause more from envy of the dominant

caste, which was almost solidly Secessionist, than from any special inclination. It seemed to them a kind of social preferment to be employed in suppressing people who had always ruled them; for once in their lives, they had the upper hand. And now, they were about to discipline the biggest man in the county. To some of them, it seemed a rather good joke.

It was daybreak when the troop galloped briskly down the lane at the Manor. Dinah, who was already astir, happened to see them from one of the kitchen windows, shortly after they had entered the gate. She hastily called to Cæsar, whom she heard moving about in his room overhead.

"Go en' wake Marse Turlo," she cried. "Git him out'n de house ez quick ez yer kin. I'll try ter keep 'em at de front do'. Praise de Lawd, dey ain't cotch him, yit; en' dey ain't gwine ter, nudder, ef I kin holp it!"

By Edgar's orders, the soldiers stationed themselves so that they guarded every exit from the house. When this had been done, Edgar strode up to the door and knocked upon it loudly. There was no response for several minutes; but at length, the door flew open with a bang, and Dinah appeared, yawning, and rubbing her eyes, as though just aroused from heavy sleep.

"Laws a mussy!" she exclaimed, staring blankly at the soldiers, "what all dese people want? What *you* doin' wid 'em, Marse Edgar?"

"Where is my nephew?" demanded Edgar.

"Marse Turlo? Go 'long, Marse Edgar!" Dinah grinned, showing a double row of shining white teeth, and added, with an easy, natural laugh, "You'se jokin' sho'ly. You knows, ez well as I does, dat Marse Turlo went way off hyondah ter jine de army. I ain't sot eyes on him sence."

"Nonsense!" said Edgar, sharply. She was lying, of

course; no doubt, it was to gain time for Turlo. Evidently, his nephew had not left the house. "Tell my brother I wish to see him."

"I ain't gwine none," said Dinah, stoutly. "Ole Marster ain't up yit, en' I daresn't break in on his mawnin' nap. He's mighty pertikler 'bout his mawnin' nap—Ole Marster iz."

"Get out of the way, then," said Edgar roughly, attempting to thrust her aside; "I'll rout him up."

He took it for granted she would obey, but Dinah, to his astonishment, did not budge. Her enormous bulk blocked up the doorway, and she had merely to oppose her inert weight to bar Edgar's passage. With her head thrown back and her tiny black eyes twinkling angrily, she planted herself more firmly and only rocked a little as he gave her a ruder shove. Enraged by her obstinacy, which was causing him to lose precious time, Edgar seized one of her arms and wrenched it viciously. The pain exasperated Dinah. With a fierce scream, she grabbed Edgar and shook him as though he were a mere toy in her hands. Strong man though he was, he could not free himself from her mighty grip.

"I great min' ter shake de breff out'n yer," she panted. "De idee o' treatin' de ole ooman dat nussed yer dat er way!"

Edgar, gasping for breath already, called to the nearest soldier for help, but before the man could reach him, the Colonel appeared at the door.

"Dinah!" he exclaimed in amazement at her outbreak, "what are you doing?"

Dinah released Edgar instantly at the sound of "Marster's" voice, but pushed him farther away from the door, which she still guarded stubbornly.

"I axes pardon, Marse," she said, breathing hard. "De Ole Boy got er holt o' me, I reckon. Hit's de fust time I wuz took dat bad. I nebber laid finger on er member o' de

fam'ly befo', but 'deed, Marse Eddie's de aggerwatinest man I ebber seed."

"What is the matter, Edgar?" demanded the Colonel. "Why are these soldiers here?"

"You ought to know," said Edgar, with a sneer. "It is said you are harbouring a rebel spy."

A rebel spy! The Colonel could hardly speak. It wasn't possible his brother had gone over to the Yankees. "You can't mean Turlo," he stammered.

"I mean no one else. I hear he has been making threats against me. Well, I am acting for the Government: it is my duty to arrest him; it saves me the trouble of taking measures of my own."

"Acting for the Government—you!" cried the Colonel, with a look of horror. "I thought, all along, you sympathised with us. To be sure, you said very little to encourage me, but I took it for granted. You can't be in earnest about arresting my son—your nephew."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Edgar, facing him insolently. "Besides, didn't you say we were strangers? I don't know any nephew; I am here to capture a spy."

"Why not tell the truth?" said the Colonel, indignantly. "You are afraid of Turlo. You know as well as I do he is no spy. Good Heavens, man, make an end of it—search the house. It sickens me to bandy words with you!"

"One moment."

It was Ole Miss's voice. The whole household, with the exception of Turlo and Cæsar, were now assembled at the door. Even the Colonel's wife, though scarcely able to stand, had struggled to the spot with Lydia's help, and with her daughter's arm about her, was watching the scene with eyes dilated with terror. She feared for her husband as well as for her son. It was more than likely Edgar would goad

him into doing something desperate. The elements of a frightful tragedy were here.

Ole Miss moved slowly towards the door, and the Colonel and Dinah made way for her. Her air was sad, but resolute; she had never looked more commanding, more austere.

"This is my house, as well as Robert's," she said coldly, addressing Edgar. "It was once your father's. You were born here. Spare yourself the shame of entering it upon such an errand. If a search must be made, let some of your followers make it."

"As you will," said Edgar indifferently, affecting a composure he was far from feeling. The collision with his mother from which he had shrunk had come, and it wasn't pleasant. But he had to brave it out, now. "Fletcher," he added, turning to a lieutenant who nominally commanded the soldiers, "take two men, and go through the house. Bring any one here you may find."

Fletcher nodded, rather shortly, in assent, and summoned the two sentries nearest to him. He did not look as if he relished the task. He was a big, honest-faced fellow, a tenant farmer, who had always lived near the Manor and had received many kindnesses from the Colonel, for whom he cherished a rude affection. It seemed to him that Edgar was "goin' too fur," but he did not venture to protest. Edgar was his official superior; his only choice was to obey. He and his companions passed into the house amid profound silence. As they disappeared at the end of the hall, Pompey, who was hovering in the background of the family group, signalled, by means of expressive winks and grimaces, to Dinah. The old woman's face brightened.

"Cheer up, Marster, en' Mistus, en' Miss Flor'," she whispered, passing rapidly from one to the other. "Cæsar's done it: Marse Turlo's got clare!"

Edgar did not notice her. He had turned away to avoid

his mother's eyes, and was gazing fixedly at a moving object at the farther end of the lane. As it drew nearer, he saw it was a carriage. Presently, he was able to distinguish the occupants. They were the Rector and Judith.

"What the devil does she want here at this hour?" he muttered, anxiously. "Has she come to warn Turlo?" He didn't like the idea that she might be capable of such a trick. If she had taken it into her head to play him false in this, she might not stop there, but try to do him more mischief in some sneaking way.

Judith had not come to warn Turlo, though she was tempted to do it. It was now a kind of duel between him and Edgar; the latter was more dangerous than ever—she could not afford to interfere. Besides, Turlo was capable of any rashness; if she told him, she might only inflame him to a more desperate pitch. She persuaded herself Edgar would hardly go to extremes. He would doubtless be content to keep Turlo in prison for a time, and then, send him South again. Even he must hesitate to condemn his nephew to death, if he could avoid it. None the less, she was tormented by anxiety, and at the first glimpse of dawn, unable to sleep, she had risen and dressed herself, and then, had hurried to the Rector's room to tell him she was about to start for the Manor. The Rector, whom she had already informed of Turlo's presence at the Manor and of his threats against Edgar, understood and shared her apprehensions. She had not told him of her visit to Edgar or of the latter's intention to secure the arrest of his nephew, but he was nevertheless much concerned, and insisted on accompanying her.

Their surprise was great when they drew up at the door, and found the house hemmed in with soldiers, and Edgar there. Judith had not dreamed he would act so openly. She sprang out of the carriage, and was about to go to him,

when an exclamation from the Rector detained her. He had turned at the sound of another vehicle which had followed close behind them, and beheld, to his amazement, his sister, Mrs. Tippett; he had believed her to be still in New York whither she had gone, some weeks before, to visit a friend of her boarding-school days—a Mrs. Ninian.

"Dorothea!" he cried, "what has brought you back so soon?"

Mrs. Tippett did not answer him. She was gazing hard at Judith.

"You minx!" she muttered exultingly, "I've found you out!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

It was all very simple. Mrs. Tippett, who had exhausted her ingenuity to no effect in trying to extract the truth from Judith without exciting her suspicion, had accidentally found a clue to her secret and Edgar's at Mrs. Ninian's. That lady's son, Mr. Jasper Ninian, who, as we have seen, had been one of the special admirers of Miss Ethel Vane, had a choice collection of portraits of the actress in a variety of costumes and poses. One day, Mrs. Ninian took Mrs. Tippett into her son's rooms to show her some Persian embroideries on a set of furniture. Mrs. Tippett inspected the apartments with an eye that missed nothing, and finally, caught sight of the pictures arranged in a frame on an easel. She stopped short instantly, and lost interest in what she had come to see. The likeness in all of them fascinated her. They were the living image of her grandniece, Judith!

Mrs. Tippett was so horrified by the scanty garments in some of the pictures that she could hardly believe her eyes. Was it possible Judith had had the audacity to masquerade in what Mrs. Tippett supposed to be "fancy" costumes of the most indecorous kind? She had come to believe that Judith might be capable of almost anything, but this was beyond even her active imagination. She was too prudent to tell her dear friend, Mrs. Ninian, her suspicions. That would be to give her a choice morsel of gossip which might seriously compromise her own good name. It would be insufferable to have such a thing get abroad about a member of the family. As yet, Mrs. Ninian did not associate her grandniece with the pictures. Mrs. Tippett was quite at

ease on this point, for she had talked very freely to her friend of Judith, and if Mrs. Ninian had known, she would have been bursting with eagerness to tell her all about it and to condole with her on the family disgrace. Mrs. Ninian was a dear, sweet creature, but she loved to say disagreeable things. Of course, Jasper knew something, but how much? If this "person" actually were Judith, she must have given another name to him. He could never have known her as a Cheston; his mother's silence was proof of that.

Mrs. Tippett lost no time in questioning Jasper.

"I am very curious about them," she said, after she had described the pictures to him. "There is such an extraordinary resemblance to some one I know. But of course, I could never have met the original of *those* pictures. My—my friend is a young lady, of the very best connections. She would never have dreamed of appearing in such clothes. I am really shocked at you, Jasper!"

"No, I don't think you ever met her," said Jasper, with a snicker—he was a pale, blond youth, with a small, conical head, prematurely bald; weak eyes, an insipid smile, who took only a languid interest in life. He rather liked the idea of having shocked Mrs. Tippett—she was so ridiculously prim. "It was quite regular, I assure you," he continued, in the hope of shocking her still more, "the usual thing, in fact, for a man about town." Here, he twirled his faint moustache negligently, with a self-satisfied smirk. "An actress, you understand. Quite a beauty, upon my word! She played us all a rather shabby trick—absconded suddenly with her manager, a dashing old buck who tried to look young, and hasn't been heard of since. Some of the fellows were hard hit. I found it rather unpleasant, myself."

"An actress!" cried Mrs. Tippett, perceiving the true significance of the "fancy" costumes. "Dear Jasper, look at this."

She produced a picture of Judith taken subsequently to her appearance at the Rectory, which she had brought with her in the hope of impressing Mrs. Ninian with her grandniece's beauty and style. Mrs. Ninian sometimes exhibited an air of condescension to her country friend which was very annoying to Mrs. Tippett, and the latter sought to correct it by intimations of a social finish at home which was quite as choice as Mrs. Ninian's. Fortunately, she had not yet shown the picture to her.

"Why, that's Ethel!" exclaimed Jasper. "Where did you get it? I never saw it before. Jove! What a stunning creature she is! The little rascal looks a thorough lady, too."

He was no longer languid, but thoroughly roused and almost eager.

"You are sure it's the same girl?" asked Mrs. Tippett breathlessly, "but it can't be."

"Of course I'm sure—there's no mistaking that face. You've seen her lately? You know where she is?"

He was really excited for the first time in months, and sat up quite straight, awaiting her answer with strong curiosity.

"No," said Mrs. Tippett, decidedly. She thought she might be pardoned the fib. The family reputation was at stake. "I haven't seen her for weeks; I don't know where she is now. It's—it's a painful subject, Jasper. The happiness of some of my friends is involved."

She questioned Jasper closely about the actress, and he was nothing loth to tell her all he knew, hoping to extract some definite information from her in return. He had no doubt whatever, in spite of her assertion, that Mrs. Tippett could point out Ethel's whereabouts, if she chose. For some reason, she had lied to him, but she might let out the truth, after awhile. It would be a fine stroke for him if he could run Ethel and that sly old fox, Darcy Montague, to earth.

What a story he would have to tell at the clubs! But Mrs. Tippett remained obdurate, and he finally gave it up as a bad job. He never deemed it worth while to persevere in any effort very long; it was too much bother.

Mrs. Tippett still found it hard to believe that Judith and the actress were really one and the same person, but Jasper was so positive, the resemblance was so extraordinary, that she decided it might be advisable to make an investigation. Accordingly, she paid a visit to a detective agency, and commissioned it to look up the actress's antecedents. The search consumed some time and cost her a considerable sum, but when, at length, she reached the stage of identifying Miss Vane's manager, Montague, with a man who had once been known as Edgar Cheston, she realised that her pains and money had not been wasted. She followed Edgar backward, step by step, to the time of his flight from the Manor, and obtained evidence to show that Judith Magruder's child had died in infancy; that the actress was the daughter of the Englishman, Dick Milbank, and that Edgar had adopted her and educated her for the stage. In foisting her upon the Rector, he had been guilty of an audacious fraud. The money he had thus obtained had, in fact, been stolen—there was no other word for it. And half of it was hers!

Assured of these facts, with the documents to prove them, Mrs. Tippett set out at once for home. She was anxious not to lose a moment lest she be too late to prevent the precious pair from making off with their plunder. The journey proved intolerably long. The trains, the ferry-boats, the special conveyances which she procured at a cost that seemed to her simply scandalous, were all so slow. Nevertheless, when she reached the county town about midnight, she tarried long enough to hold a consultation with Reeve, whom she routed out of bed. It would be necessary to employ a lawyer to impound the money and take other proceedings

against Edgar and the so-called Judith, and there was none cleverer than Reeve.

Heaven seemed to open to the lawyer when he heard her news. His eyes snapped viciously at certain stages of her recital. She had delivered Edgar into his hands. Political influence, however strong, would hardly avail to protect him against a criminal charge. He could not only take the money from him, but land him in the penitentiary. Edgar was practically a ruined man and would soon be a convicted felon. How fortunate he hadn't yet conveyed the mortgages to him!

"I'll leave for Baltimore to-morrow," he said, when Mrs. Tippett finished her story and asked him what should be done. "I know where the money is—in the Chesapeake Bank. He told me so the other day. There will be no trouble in getting out an attachment so that not a penny of it can be drawn until your rights are established."

"You think it is really safe?" asked Mrs. Tippett, anxiously. "I run no risk in telling what I know? I am dying to expose those creatures."

"Make yourself perfectly easy," said Reeve. "He can't get it away from *me*."

When Mrs. Tippett reached the Rectory, she was informed by the servants that her brother and "Miss Judith" had just left for the Manor. She concluded that something important must have happened to take them out so early, and at once set off in pursuit. As her carriage drew up at the Manor door behind the Rector's gig, and she saw Judith and Edgar, with the family group on the verandah in the background, she felt she had come at an opportune moment. All the parties to the affair were here. She could make her disclosure with the fullest dramatic effect and so suddenly that Edgar would have no chance of parrying the blow. She did not stop to think of the grief she would cause the

Rector; she was conscious only of a virtuous sense of obligation to open his eyes. He ought to thank her for effecting his deliverance from a brace of rogues.

In her eagerness, she scrambled out of her carriage just as the Rector alighted from his gig, and ran towards him with extended arms.

"My dear Stephen," she cried, "I have made an amazing discovery. You and I have both been defrauded. This girl"—here she shot a swift, contemptuous glance at Judith —" is not your granddaughter, after all. Our Judith's child died long ago. Edgar has imposed a protégée of his own upon us."

She spoke in a loud voice, so that every one might hear. The Rector stood transfixed, gazing at her with an air of concern. It was clear to him she was out of her head. Judith looked anxiously at Edgar who flashed back a warning glance. How the devil had this detective in petticoats managed to get on his track? He cursed her heartily, and wished he could gag her. But he must hear what she had to say; perhaps, it might prove to be only part of the truth. If there was a gap or even a flaw in her story, he might win yet.

"I found a clue in New York," continued Mrs. Tippett rapidly, addressing herself to the audience generally, as her brother did not seem to be sufficiently impressed. "Following it up, I discovered that the girl's father was an English actor whom Edgar met out west. He took her, a mere child, at her father's death, and trained her for the stage. She is well known as a burlesque actress in New York. It was easy for her to play her part here. I think we will all agree she has played it cleverly. Their object, of course, was to obtain the fortune bequeathed to my niece's child. That's safe, and the Manor's safe. Reeve tells me the mortgages—"

"Stop!" cried the Rector, sternly. His usually placid

face was working with anger. What did Dorothea mean by spreading this shameful pack of falsehoods before all these people? She had always been too ready to believe evil of any one and to repeat it. He had remonstrated with her gently, more than once, but this was outrageous. "Some one has imposed upon you, Dorothea," he added, "you *can't* believe what you say."

He was thinking, very reluctantly, that perhaps, even though she did not believe it, she might be capable of accepting the monstrous story because a fortune was at stake. Her cupidity had long been a cause of anxiety and distress to him.

"I have proofs for all I've said," exclaimed Mrs. Tippett, unabashed. "If you doubt me," she added, pointing to Judith and Edgar, "ask them."

Their faces corroborated her. Judith was white to the lips. It was all ended—her daring hopes, her fond aspirations, her glowing vision of happiness as Basil's wife. It had been but a mirage. He was sure to know, now! As for Edgar, he looked old and broken. For the moment, his self-confidence was gone. He did not doubt Mrs. Tippett's boasts. She had evidently run him down. The Manor was lost to him a second time. Curse the luck! It almost seemed as if there might be a Providence, after all—a Providence that was inexorably set against him. But aid came to Judith from the Rector.

"Don't answer her, my child," he cried, hurrying to her, his face aglow with confidence and love. Pressing her fondly to him, he kissed her on the forehead, and tenderly stroked her cheek. "Why *should* you answer so absurd a charge?" he asked, looking down into her face with perfect trust in his gaze. "It is enough for me to look at you to see my daughter as she was at your age. Could *I* be deceived?"

"But the proofs, Stephen, the proofs!" gasped Mrs. Tippett, dismayed at the turn the affair had taken.

"I don't care a fig for your proofs," retorted the Rector, vehemently. "I won't believe the story, I tell you. Nothing shall make me accept it as even possible. What—have I waited all these years for my grandchild only to be told, now that I have her, that I have grown to love her, that she is a wretched creature whom I ought to spurn? Even if you *could* prove it, Dorothea, in black and white, I would not consent to put her from me. I have grown to love her for herself, and nothing shall part us!"

"Oh, very well, Stephen, very well!" cried Mrs. Tippett, beside herself with anger and disappointment. "If you will persist in your foolish credulity, I have nothing more to say."

"You have already said too much," replied the Rector, still indignant. "Come with me, Judith," he added, drawing her away. "We will return to the Rectory where you will be safe. No one shall molest you there."

"My brother is in his dotage," exclaimed Mrs. Tippett, as soon as the Rector was out of hearing. "That girl has bamboozled him." Turning to Edgar, she added, "*You* know that every word I have uttered is true."

Edgar answered her only with a venomous glance.

"You can reassure yourself, Robert," said Mrs. Tippett, addressing the Colonel with a blandly patronising air—how delightful it was for her to feel, and to make him feel, that she was his benefactress!—"The mortgages are safe with Reeve. If he makes any trouble, come to me; I can let you have the money at six per cent." She was not averse to doing a good stroke of business.

The Manor was saved to him! The Colonel could hardly believe it; he gazed at Mrs. Tippett with an uncertain look. The spell of astonishment was also upon the other members

of the household. But as Mrs. Tippett glanced about her, with a serenely self-satisfied air, as though expecting a chorus of acknowledgments, Lydia sprang to her father's side with a cry of delight, and her mother uttered a sob of joy, qualified by a lingering fear of Edgar. Were they really delivered from him at last?

The Colonel glanced at his wife and daughter, and uttered, in a low voice, a heartfelt "Thank God!"

Edgar heard him, and his head swam. For a moment, everything was black to his eyes. Was he to be cheated of his vengeance too? He had the money safe in bank, and it would go far to compensate him for the failure of his designs upon the Manor, but this pair whom he had meant to torment had escaped him, and would yet be happy. Not quite yet; there was Turlo; besides, he could hale his brother off to prison. That would sober them. He would keep this stroke for the last; in the meantime, if Fletcher failed to find Turlo, the threat of his brother's arrest, as Reeve had suggested, might enable him to extort the secret from them. Perhaps, Lydia would tell, to save her father. She might very well assume her brother would wish her to do so. Or one of the negroes would surely weaken. He knew the absurd devotion of Dinah and Pompey to "Ole Marse," and Phyllis was a treacherous creature. He was revolving these thoughts in his mind when Fletcher appeared with the announcement that a thorough search of the house had been made, and Turlo was not to be found. Edgar glanced at the family group with a malicious smile.

"Well, we can take a substitute," he said. "You have a warrant for my brother's arrest, Fletcher. Unless some one tells us where Turlo is, he'll have to go with us."

CHAPTER XL

It was a thunderbolt for everybody except the Colonel. He had been surprised, and in fact, a trifle disappointed at not having been called to account before. It was humiliating to be overlooked when Secessionists all about him were being arrested. It really seemed as if the Government meant to ignore him. Had its agents satisfied themselves that he was merely a loud-talking, vainglorious fellow, without real influence or power? His friends, too, might well wonder at his strange exemption. People might even suspect him of having made his peace with the Federal authorities. He had no means of knowing that he had been shielded by his brother for purposes of his own. Edgar's announcement was, in one sense, welcome to him. It satisfied him he had not been overlooked, after all; his apprehension had only been delayed.

The effect on the family, of course, was very different. The Colonel's wife fell, half-fainting, into his arms. Ole Miss's eyes flashed angrily, but she choked down a sob. She could not bring herself to speak to Edgar, to utter a word of protest. If he were capable of even proposing such an outrage in her presence, he was dead to any appeal from her. Grief showed in every face, but to Edgar's disappointment, Lydia was dumb, and none of the negroes gave any sign of yielding, though Pompey was sorely tempted. He plucked Dinah by the sleeve and whispered, "Hit mought save Ole Marse ef I tole I seen Marse Turlo makin' fur de cove, en' dey can't ketch him, now."

"You breathe a word o' dat," muttered Dinah fiercely,

" en' I'll stomp you in de dirt! Marster ain't in enny great danger, en' Marse Turlo iz. Cæsar tole me dey mought hang him fur a spy. You keep yo' mouf shet. You wuz allers too free wid yo' tongue."

The Colonel found it hard to disengage himself from his wife, who clung to him with the tenacity of despair. At length, unclasping her hands, he surrendered her scarce conscious to Lydia.

" Take good care of her, little girl," he whispered.

" I will try, Papa," she said, looking up at him bravely, through a mist of tears.

The Colonel turned to his mother. For his sake, Ole Miss controlled her grief by a great effort, and said firmly,

" God be with you, my son ! "

Miss Twiggs and Mr. Plunkett came forward to take leave of him, and then, the Colonel shook hands with each of the servants.

" I am ready, Fletcher," he said, almost cheerfully. He did not seem to see his brother. Fletcher was about to offer him his horse, but before he could speak, a figure in a captain's uniform, suddenly detaching itself from a group of soldiers, strode towards him across the lawn. There was a general cry of surprise. It was Basil Kent.

Basil had come home, invalided from a serious wound. On his way, he had met Lawyer Reeve, shortly after the latter's interview with Mrs. Tippett. Reeve, who no longer had the fear of Edgar before his eyes, told him of the latter's departure for the Manor with a party of troops. Basil did not wait to hear more, but started at once for the scene. The blow, he made sure, was aimed at the Colonel ; it was in his power to protect him. While in Washington, arranging his affairs at the War Department, he had learned, to his great surprise, that no charges had as yet been preferred against the Colonel, although many arrests had been made

in his county. Concluding that so active a Secessionist would get into trouble sooner or later, he thought it would be well to apply for an order to the military commander at home not to molest the Colonel without specific directions from the Department. He had reason to hope his petition would be granted, inasmuch as he had distinguished himself in action and had been recommended for promotion. The Department officials were, in fact, relieved on finding he asked nothing for himself, and seemed content with so small a favour. They were beset with men clamouring for "recognition," and it was hard to find places enough to go round. Besides, the Colonel was not officially known to be disloyal. The only condition attached to the order was that Basil should hold himself responsible for the Colonel's good behaviour. How thankful he was that he had obtained it!

Basil had galloped down the lane unobserved in the general excitement, and had sprung off his sweating horse just as the Colonel turned to accompany Fletcher. He understood at once the meaning of the scene. The Colonel was about to be carried off.

"Ah, Colonel," he exclaimed, as he hurried forward, "I am just in time!"

"To escort me to prison?" asked the Colonel, with a touch of bitterness. Did not Basil wear a "Yankee" uniform?

Basil drew back, hurt.

"How can you think that of me?" he asked, with a look of distress. "I came to save you from annoyance." As he spoke, he drew the precious order from his breast-pocket, and handed it to Fletcher. "I got that in Washington," he explained to the Colonel, "I thought you might need it. It protects you from arrest except upon express authority from the War Department."

"That was kind of you, my boy!" said the Colonel,

seizing both his hands. "Forgive me for having doubted you, but when my own brother——"

"You are free, Colonel," interrupted Fletcher, his face lighting up. It wasn't necessary to consult Edgar, and he wasn't inclined to show him any particular deference, now that he could act independently of him.

"I knew he had come to help us!" exclaimed Lydia, in a low, glad voice. Now that Basil was there, all would be well. The old feeling of trust in the strong, self-reliant companion of her childhood inspired her with confidence in his ability to settle everything. He was still the same Basil —so thoughtful, so kind, so sure to do the right thing.

Moved by an impulse which conquered her shyness, she yielded her place at her mother's side to Miss Twiggs, and hurried down the gravel path to greet him. Feeling the touch of a hand on one of his own, Basil turned hastily and met the speaking gaze of eyes which had never seemed to him so soft, so tender.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Basil!" she murmured.

Ah, the sound of that voice! The light in those eyes! Basil thought of Judith and of Oswald, and turned sadly away. How foolish to imagine that Lydia might, perhaps, be moved by a feeling warmer than gratitude for what he had done for her father! And even if the unwonted softness of her glances, the sweetness of her voice *did* mean something else—as, of course, they could not—what would it avail him? His faith was pledged to Judith, and Lydia, he was almost sure, had promised herself to Oswald.

"There is little to thank me for," he said, controlling himself, and as it seemed to her, almost coldly, "I am glad to be of use to your father."

Lydia dropped his hand, and drew away from him with face overcast. She was ashamed of her impetuousness which, it seemed to her, had met with a rebuff. And how could

she have expected that Basil would be otherwise than indifferent? She was nothing to him.

Edgar made no effort to resist Basil. In fact, he was rather glad he had taken his brother off his hands. His attempt to use the arrest as a means of extorting the betrayal of Turlo's hiding place had failed, and "Bob" seemed rather to like the idea of going to prison. He had no taste for unprofitable villainy. If he could only put his hands upon Turlo! Once he had him safe, he would hurry off to draw the Magruder money out of bank before that cunning fox, Mrs. Tippett, got scent of it. And then away again, far off, to spend it and drown the memory of all he had lost. Perhaps, now that Judith's identity was exposed and the means of respectable livelihood was about to be withdrawn from her, as Mrs. Tippett would take care it should be, she might consent to share his fortunes again. The Rector could not hold out in the face of facts which were not to be controverted, and Judith's marriage to Basil Kent was out of the question. The fellow was a prig, and would drop her instantly. She would soon be without resources. The need of money was a wonderful chastener, and reconciled the most obstinate to harsh conditions. If he could persuade her, he might find life still interesting, after all. In her despair, she might even turn gratefully to him.

He was about to order out scouting parties in pursuit of Turlo when he caught sight of Smyrk beckoning excitedly from behind a corner of the graveyard wall. He hurried to him, feeling sure he had discovered something, and Smyrk, with a nervous grasp on his shoulder, drew him into the shelter of a large arbor-vitæ which hid them from view. Smyrk was desperately anxious to conceal his agency in the affair from the eyes of any member of the Manor household, especially Cæsar, who had been watching him of late with disquieting

persistence. It wouldn't do to get the Colonel "down" on him, and Mr. Turlo, should he escape his uncle, would make it hot for him, if he discovered his treachery.

"I bin tryin' ter git nigh you fur five er ten minutes," mumbled Smyrk, with an eager note in his voice, "but I was feerd summun ud see me, en' drap on my game. I caught sight o' Mr. Turlo en' Cæsar a steerin' fur the cove, en' follered 'em. Cæsar's gone ter git a boat ter kerry Mr. Turlo off. He's waitin' fur Cæsar on the hill by the wharf."

"Ah!" exclaimed Edgar, with fire in his eyes. He knew, now, what to do. Turning abruptly from Smyrk, who stole off under cover of a hedge, he hurried back to the front of the house.

"How about Turlo?" he called out, in a grating voice to Basil, "have you a document securing protection to *him?*"

Basil glanced at Edgar in surprise. He thought Turlo was still somewhere in the South. Was it possible he had been so foolhardy as to return to the Manor?

"No," he answered reluctantly, "I haven't."

"Then, Fletcher," said Edgar, in a fierce tone of triumph, "I think we'll continue the search. I know which way he went."

He was not sure that Turlo was still at the place where Smyrk had seen him. He might, by this time, have got away in the boat or be lurking somewhere in the garden. He determined to beat the garden thoroughly, and broke up Fletcher's party into twos and threes, with instructions to proceed in different directions so that, after making a search of every path and alley, they would converge at the hill near the wharf. Accompanied by a single trooper, Edgar took the straightest course to the spot. He was anxious to ascertain as soon as possible whether his nephew was there. On the way, he ordered the soldier with him to prod the great box trees which lined their path.

"He might easily lie hid in one of them," he said. The man obeyed rather carelessly—it seemed to him a cruel job—and was slow about it. Edgar hurried on, and had soon left his companion some distance behind.

Turlo, hidden behind one of the great oaks on the summit of the knoll, but on the watch, saw him coming. Cæsar had been delayed in obtaining a boat, but at last, had found one some distance down the cove and was paddling swiftly towards him. Turlo hesitated. All he had to do was to run down the bank, plunge into the water, and swim out to Cæsar, who was now but a short way off. It would be easy for him to escape. He glanced again at Edgar, and noticed that he was alone. Here and there, in the distance, the soldiers were traversing the garden. Why should he seek to avoid him? Wasn't this the very opportunity for which he had longed? He was not afraid of him; his only fear had been of capture and the frustration of his passionate desire to grapple with him single handed. He decided to wait: it might be his only chance.

Edgar came quickly up the hill. When he was some ten paces from him, Turlo stepped out from behind the tree. His manner was quiet, though his brain was seething. He longed to rush upon his uncle: the murderous mania flamed up fiercely; but he controlled himself. He must make sure. He had no weapon: he must use stratagem or take the risk of being shot. What joy to outwit his clever uncle; to trap him, like a crafty beast!

"Hands up!" cried Edgar, covering him with a revolver.

Turlo promptly raised his hands.

"I surrender, Uncle," he said, submissively, "you've been too clever for me; I am unarmed."

"Well, come with me," said Edgar, rejoicing at the ease with which he had effected the capture. His nephew was chicken-hearted, after all.

Turlo advanced towards him, still holding up his hands. Edgar grasped him by the shoulder. Turlo seemed to shrink at his touch, and Edgar, completely reassured, lowered the revolver slightly. Turlo had counted on some such imprudence. Quick as a flash, he seized the hand that held the pistol and twisted it sharply, causing the weapon to fall to the ground. The next moment, he had pinioned his uncle in his arms.

"You're my prisoner now!" he cried, with savage joy. He had him—at last.

For a moment, Edgar could not realise what had happened. Was the fool in earnest, with soldiers close at hand? But were they close? No; there was but one of them who had followed him, and curse him, he had loitered behind. With a desperate effort, he sought to wrench himself free, but Turlo held him fast. If he could but recover the pistol! He stooped suddenly, and carrying Turlo down with him, fell heavily. For a moment, Turlo was shaken off, but immediately regained his hold. It was not so easy, however, to master his uncle. He had the advantage of youth, but he was weakened by privation; Edgar was still a powerful man, and terror lent him additional strength. He was well aware of his peril, now. His nephew was a madman; he had tricked him with a madman's cunning; he meant to kill him. There was but one alternative: he must either get the pistol and kill *him*, or else, baffle him until the soldiers could come to his aid. Turlo sought to overpower him with his greater weight; to his surprise, his uncle proved to be as agile as a cat, and succeeded in writhing from under him again and again. They rolled over and over on the ground like furious brutes. Turlo began to be anxious; he was losing time; at any moment, the soldiers might appear.

Edgar's eyes always sought the pistol. Inch by inch, he

won nearer to it. At last, his heart gave a joyous bound. It was within his grasp. Putting forth all his strength, he struggled to his knees, and reached for the prize. But Turlo was quicker than he. As Edgar's hand closed upon the pistol, he stamped upon it, breaking the arm at the wrist. With a cry of anguish, Edgar sank back, and Turlo seizing him, dragged him to the edge of the bluff.

"It's no use, Uncle!" he cried hoarsely—he was nearly spent—"*I* don't want the pistol—shooting is too good for you: I'm going to drown you like a rat!"

Edgar glanced about him wildly, with foam on his lips. His blood turned cold as he looked down at the black, miry depths of the cove. He remembered having seen the ghastly face of a man who had been smothered in that dreadful ooze. What a horrible death to die—here, within reach of aid! He had called again and again to the soldiers, and had heard their answering shouts. Why were they not here? They *must* be in time. He was helpless, now, in this young giant's hands. Another moment, perhaps, and then—

Had it actually come to this—his plotting and scheming, his cleverness, his boasted strength? Was Death really there—at his feet? No, it couldn't be.—In a flash, he saw the whole procession of his lusts, unsatisfied. He had so much to live for, so much to enjoy, in spite of all. Never, even in his buoyant youth, had he known so vigorous a pulse of life in his veins. It was incredible that he should be menaced, thus, at the climax of his powers, in the full tide of his disciplined energies, by a silly boy whom he had thought to crush with scarcely an effort. What a damned impertinence of fate! If he could but hold out a little longer. God, the fellow was throttling him! Ah, there was some one running; he could hear the rapid patter of feet on dry leaves; he was saved!

Turlo, also, heard. Glancing round, he saw the sol-

dier who had set out with Edgar, dashing up the slope. "Too late, Uncle!" he said, with a biting laugh. "What—you won't let go?" he added, furiously, as Edgar clasped his uninjured arm tightly about his neck, and clung to him desperately in the hope of saving himself from being thrown over the bluff. Turlo dared not relax his hold to stun him with a blow. He felt his strength was ebbing fast. There was but one thing to do; he must jump in with him. He might be drowned, but his uncle would not escape him. "I meant to *send* you to hell," he panted, taking a firmer grip of him, "we'll go together!"

Edgar struck wildly at him with his maimed hand, shrieking a curse at the soldier and bidding him shoot. The man levelled his gun; but Turlo, with a supreme effort, hoisted Edgar from his feet, and sprang with him straight to the bottom of the cove.

The soldier, horror-stricken, ran cautiously to the brow of the hill, and looked down. They rose but once, still locked in each other's arms, their faces distorted with rage and hate; then, the waters closed over them, and all was still. The man imagined they had lost their footing and tumbled in. Turlo's desperate words had not reached him; he could not guess that he had planned the thing, and rather than be baulked, had flung his own life away. To the soldier's eyes, it was but natural he should have resisted arrest, and it was Edgar's foolhardiness in seeking to capture him without help that had cost the two lives.

Cæsar knew better. From his place in the boat, he had witnessed the whole struggle, and paddling desperately in the hope of being able to interfere, had got near enough to hear Turlo tell his uncle he meant to drown him. He knew, therefore, it was not an accident. It was murder and suicide—nothing less. "Dat ud be en ugly story ef it got erbout," he said to himself, "I ain't gwine ter have Marse

Turlo's name blackened. Besides, Marse Edgar deserved what he got. De fam'ly'll have trouble enough ez it is. Nobody's gwine ter make me say 'twan't en accident. Dat'll kiver it up."

He was greatly relieved when he found the only other witness of the tragedy had no suspicion of the truth. Cæsar was satisfied he would stick to his story, which corresponded exactly with what *he* meant to tell. "They fit, en' fell in," said the soldier. That was all he knew. "Dat wuz it," assented Cæsar. "I seed it, plain." The secret, like many another family secret, was safe with him.

CHAPTER XLI

On the way home from the Manor, the Rector strove to reassure and comfort Judith. "You must try not to mind what Dorothea said, my dear," he urged. "It was very unkind of her, but she was doubtless misled by what seemed to her a plausible story. She has never liked Edgar Cheston, and though he *is* your father, I must say my opinion of him is—well, a little prejudiced. Dorothea has worked herself up to the belief that she has been defrauded, and I'm sorry to say she attaches too much importance to money. You won't permit yourself to think that I give the least credit to her charges?"

"You are very good," said Judith, dully. She was apathetic, almost benumbed. What did it matter? Nothing was of moment to her now that the future she had built up for herself was laid in ruins. Nevertheless, she was grateful to him. He had gained her time to think, to determine what she should do.

When the Rector reached home, he seemed very tired. He had had no breakfast, and the reaction from the excitement through which he had passed left him weak and faint. Judith persuaded him to eat a bit of toast and to swallow some strong coffee. When he rose from the table, staggering a little, and started towards the study, saying he had some papers he wished to read, Judith accompanied him. She dreaded to be left alone. His sympathy and affection were, after all, a support to her. It was comforting to feel there was still some one who cared for and believed in her. The Rector seated himself at a table near the fire, and began

to look over a packet of letters he had taken from a desk. They were letters written by his daughter after her elopement and marriage to Edgar Cheston, and among other things, they told of the birth of her child, and described her as "a little beauty," with golden hair and blue eyes.

Judith had placed a chair near him, and sat with her hands clasped about her knees, gazing into the fire and listening, not too attentively, as he read to her a passage here and there. She felt she ought to connive at his self-deception. The delusion pleased him, and could do no harm. She owed him something; he really loved her. Ah, if Basil Kent were as infatuated! If he would but come to her and say he cared for her so much that nothing mattered—not even her guilt. He might come to her, in spite of what was now known about her, but he would not say that. He did not love her—his letters showed that. They were kind and even affectionate, but they lacked the one thing she craved—the passion she might easily have inspired in any other man. Sooner or later, he must learn all. What *would* he say to her if, by any accident, they met? She shuddered at the thought of what he might say. Meanwhile, she suffered with the aching sense of nothingness. Her future was blank. She could form for herself no scheme of action that seemed worth the effort. She could only hope she might be spared the agony of ever seeing Basil again.

An hour or more had passed in this way when, of a sudden, Mrs. Tippett burst in upon them all agog with the news of the catastrophe that had happened at the Manor.

"Have you heard?" she exclaimed, excitedly. She included Judith in her question, forgetting for the moment that she had resolved not to recognise her when she next saw her.

The Rector looked up from his letters rather peevishly. He had had enough of Dorothea's sensations.

"Edgar undertook to arrest the Colonel," continued Mrs. Tippett breathlessly, "but Basil Kent arrived just in time with some kind of paper from the War Department which permitted him to interfere. Edgar then gave an order to search the garden for Turlo, and himself led the way. He and Turlo met on the bluff near the cove. There was a struggle on the brink, and both tumbled in and were drowned."

"Drowned!" cried Judith, half rising from her seat and falling back, unnerved. Edgar was dead! The man who had blighted her life would never again have power to harm. The wish she had scarcely dared to utter to herself was a fact. She felt dizzy, ill, ashamed. But was she not avenged? Turlo had kept his word; he had made her free—now, when she no longer cared for freedom.

The Rector tottered to his feet, shocked and angry.

"Have you no heart, Dorothea?" he cried, pointing to Judith. "You forget she is his child!"

"His child!" said Mrs. Tippett, with a contemptuous sniff.

Her insolence was too much for the Rector. He stood for a moment, choking with indignation, and then, fell headlong to the floor, insensible from an apoplectic stroke. Mrs. Tippett rushed to him, but Judith was before her. Kneeling beside him, she raised his head tenderly, letting it rest against her bosom, and tore open his shirt collar.

"Go and get some brandy," she cried hastily to Mrs. Tippett. That usually resolute person stared at her vacantly, indignant yet uncertain as to what she ought to do. "Go, I tell you," added Judith, impatiently. "You may have killed him. You think I have no place here? Well, I have; he loves me. Besides, you haven't proved I'm not his granddaughter. Until the courts turn me out, I've the right to stay, and I *shall* stay while he needs me. You needn't fear to leave me with him. I shan't try to rob you a second time. The money is nothing to me, now. Go!"

Mrs. Tippett would never have believed it possible, but she turned and went. The girl frightened her. She was like a lioness defending her cub. Besides, what she said was true; she had no legal right to banish her, yet.

Judith took command of the servants, sent off post-haste for a doctor, and helped to carry the Rector to his room. She undressed him herself, and lifting him in her strong arms, laid him gently in bed. He had now partly recovered consciousness and could utter a few broken sentences. His eyes followed her slightest movements with eager love and gratitude. "My darling!" he whispered once; "Who will dare—to—say—you're—not—my—granddaughter, *now?*" She kissed him on the forehead. He was very dear to her —this dying old man, whose faith in her was unbounded to the last.

Mrs. Tippett crept into the sick room at intervals, but always found Judith on guard. It seemed to her unheard of that she should not be the central figure of the scene. It had always been her habit to pose as a ministering angel on such occasions. Nursing was, in fact, her special forte. It was the more congenial to her because it afforded so many opportunities for "improving" talk, a word in season, to people who might have eluded her except when helpless in bed. And her brother, more than any one else, claimed her special care and attention. Theoretically, it was almost indecent that this girl should usurp her place at his bedside, but when she met Judith's steady, unregarding gaze, she was afraid to insist. She was daunted by her quiet self-confidence, her evident determination to remain at her post. Even Mrs. Tippett could not accuse her of a selfish motive. In spite of herself, she believed what Judith had said about the money. Incredible as it seemed, the creature was not incapable of gratitude. Her brother had some reason for his obstinacy, after all. Mrs. Tippett began to feel uncom-

fortable as to the judgment she had pronounced upon her. If Judith stayed by the Rector until she was no longer needed, and then, went away without claiming anything, people might say that she, Mrs. Tippett, had been uncharitable, hard. Her conscience was little more than a keen regard for the opinions of others. She was almost willing to be kind to Judith.

Judith sought no concessions from her. She wished the physician would come, so that he might tell her whether she had much longer to wait. She had never seen death imminent, but she thought she recognised it now. When the Rector had breathed his last, his hand in hers, there would be nothing to hold her longer to this spot. She was burning to get away, to hide in some secluded corner where no one knew her for what she was—a cheat, an impostor, a thief. Then would come the awakening to that other life she dreaded. Meanwhile, she waited, patiently. For the first time, she realised what gratitude and duty mean; what burdens affection lays on shoulders that have never borne its yoke. She was doing an unselfish thing, a thing that caused her pain, yet shed a refreshing dew upon her tortured heart. She could not leave him; it pleased her to think she made him happy at the close of a long life, full of good deeds, and that none other could replace her, vagabond though she was. For him, she was real, though fictitious; he had touched in her the springs of genuine love.

The doctor arrived in the course of an hour. At the first glance, his eyes grew grave. The Rector was barely conscious: his respiration was faint; the end was near.

"Has he made his will?" the doctor asked Judith, drawing her aside.

"I don't know," she answered, indifferently. It was of no concern to her.

"If he hasn't," said the doctor, "it's too late, now." He

glanced at Judith sympathetically. He was a little, dried-up old man, but he had a kind heart and a weakness for pretty women. The news of Mrs. Tippett's revelations at the Manor had reached him, and though that lady was now more guarded, she had just given him to understand that Judith's title to the Magruder fortune was at least a matter of doubt. He felt very sorry for the beautiful girl. The Rector, he was sure, would have wished to make some provision for her. He regretted he had not arrived a little sooner. He would have undertaken, himself, to draw up a will. But it was out of the question now, and she didn't seem to care. He was inclined to doubt the charges against her.

Judith took her seat again at the Rector's side, and laid her hand in his. He pressed it feebly, and a faint smile showed itself for a moment in his glazing eyes, as she wiped away the clammy moisture that gathered on his brow. She felt him growing colder; he began to gasp. She raised his head so that he might breathe more easily: a convulsive tremor shook him, and he fell back on the pillow—he was dead. She bent down and kissed him; then turned to go. He needed her no longer. At the door, she met Mrs. Tippett, who uttered a shrill scream at sight of the motionless form on the bed. Judith passed her without a word. She had no part in Mrs. Tippett's grief, nor in anything here. Her only thought, now, was to leave the Rectory at once. Basil was at the Manor, so Mrs. Tippett had said; he might come at any moment. She couldn't bear that! Anxious to make sure of her escape, while there was still time, she hurried downstairs to give the order for a carriage to convey her to the nearest wharf. As she reached the hall, the front door opened, and Basil entered.

CHAPTER XLII

JUDITH drew back hastily, and would have fled upstairs, but it was too late. Basil had seen her, and was coming towards her. She stiffened at his approach. Since it had to be, she would not flinch. In spite of her dread of him, she was almost glad, now that a meeting was inevitable; it would be as well for her to know the worst. At least, she would not be haunted by the thought that he *might* have pardoned her, and taken her to his heart. Of course, that couldn't be, and yet, had she succeeded in stealing away without seeing him, she might never have been quite sure.

Basil's face was grave, but it brightened when he saw her.

"Judith!" he exclaimed, offering her his hand. "I've just come from the Manor. Dreadful things have happened there. You know about your father? I've hastened here to see if I could be of any help."

"My father!" she said, with a strange smile. "Then, you haven't heard?"

"What Mrs. Tippett said about you?" he asked, with evident constraint. "Yes, Mr. Plunkett told me. But of course, I didn't believe it. Both of them are prone to jump to conclusions on very slight evidence. And how could I believe it of you?"

"But what if it were true?" she demanded, with bated breath. Could it be he meant to ignore the truth? Was it possible he cared enough for her, after all, to take her as she was, and close his eyes to her guilt? Ah, that were too much to hope for! And yet, there *was* a flicker of hope in her heart, rekindled suddenly amid the embers of her ruined happiness by the unquenchable flame of her desire. She

willed it to be so, and stood before him, radiant with an energy of passion that gave her beauty a new, transcendent charm. She felt a sense of returning power, such as she had so often wielded, and rejoiced. For the moment, she was almost confident. No; he could not resist her if—if he cared but a little less than she feared for that girl.

"If it were true!" exclaimed Basil, shocked; "but surely, Judith, you don't mean to ask that question of me?"

He had come to her in good faith, anxious to show unshaken confidence in her. There might be truth in the story, so far as Edgar Cheston was concerned. Basil had seen enough that day to convince him he was capable of almost any crime. A man who could arrest his brother and hunt his nephew to death would not hesitate at a mere fraud. But that Judith was guilty of conscious complicity with him, he did not, for a moment, believe. The mere idea was odious to him. Even if she were not Edgar's daughter, she might have been led to think herself to be so. It was but natural she should wish to hide from a community so rigid in its social prejudices the fact that she had been on the stage. It were easy enough to pardon her that. To his mind, she was scarcely affected at all by Mrs. Tippett's revelations. Even had he thought her blamable, he would have excused her on the ground of her father's influence over her. How could he doubt she was sound at heart? Had she not always shown herself to him to be a refined and gifted woman, ingenuous, pure-minded, true? Could any woman, clever actress though she be, keep up such an imposture, day after day, without some unconscious lapse which would have betrayed her? The thing was absurd.

At any rate, he, of all men, should be the last to doubt her. In so far as he was concerned, it was clear, she had been moved only by the impulses of her heart. The most sceptical could attribute no sordid motive in her preference of

him. He had nothing to give her, he fancied but the constancy, the affection, the sympathy it should be a privilege to offer. He was bound to her by ties that seemed to him to be sacred, that he could not permit himself to think might be broken. His only thought had been to hasten to her, to protect her, to shield her from detraction, to reassure her with his unquestioning belief. She had honoured him supremely; he would honour her, now, in the way she would value most, by lifting her above the reach of slander and malice. He had come to beg her to go to her grandfather with him, that he might ask the Rector to make them man and wife. And she asked him what if the lies that had been told about her were true! Perhaps, it was merely a bit of coquetry—but it seemed strange, and jarred on him at a moment like this. No doubt, she was a little unstrung.

"Of course, you were jesting," he added, with a rather forced smile. "I came to ask you to marry me, at once."

Jesting! The truth, she saw, was inconceivable to him. His words extinguished the last spark of hope. They said to her plainly that he was ready to make her his wife *because* he believed in her. Had he not believed, had he doubted even, he would have recoiled. Her only power over him was that which sprang from his loyalty, his faith in her. She might have known it! What a fool she had been to dream, even for a moment, of reconciling him to her shame! The truth must be brought home to him, sooner or later, in spite of his generous incredulity—there was no escape. If she permitted him to marry her, he could never forgive her; for him, she would be an abandoned creature who had foully abused his trust. They would drag out their lives together in bonds that would be hateful to him and torturing for her. That were worse—infinitely worse—than to lose him. She could imagine no greater torment in hell.

"To marry me," she repeated after him, mechanically. It seemed to her as if she were uttering the words by rote. The prize she panted for—it was hers to take, and she could not take it!

"Yes," he said, puzzled at her strange agitation, "shall we go to the Rector?"

"Hush!" she murmured, suddenly recollecting what had happened upstairs, and drawing Basil into the study, "he is dead."

"Dead!" cried Basil, inexpressibly shocked.

"He was at the Manor, and heard Mrs. Tippett. It was too much for him. He had a stroke an hour or two ago, and died in my arms. He never doubted me; I don't believe it would have made much difference if he had. He loved me."

She spoke almost coldly, as if merely making a statement of facts that had no particular significance for her. Basil was conscious of a veiled reproach in her words. Could she mean that if *he* loved her, it would make no difference whether what was said of her were true? He was beginning to be disturbed. Why did she persist in forcing this issue upon him? Well, she was right; he did not love her! He had tried hard enough. It *ought* to be easy for him. Many men would have envied him the chance. But there was that other image that haunted him still—that face, those eyes, which would not be banished. During his absence in the army, the influence he had felt in Judith's presence on that eventful night at the Rectory had faded more and more; at times, he was dismayed by a feeling of actual repugnance at the thought of marrying her; he awoke with a shock, at last, to the knowledge that it would be impossible ever really to give her his heart. It was Lydia to whom his thoughts insistently turned. Though lost to him, she was ever present. In the quiet watches by the camp fire at night; in the hurried

march; yes—even in the roar of battle, it had been the same. He thought of her always with inextinguishable longing, with passionate regret. How could he tell Judith that he loved her, anxious though he was to soothe her, to assure her of his fidelity, his desire to help? He had convinced himself it might, some day, be his duty to deceive her; but now, at the supreme moment, he knew it was impossible. She would read the falsehood in his eyes. He was but a bungler, after all.

"We must part," continued Judith, gazing straight at him, with growing harshness in her voice. It was time to make an end. The truth must be made clear to him *now*, by her; otherwise, there would be no finality in their parting. Since the wrench must come, she preferred it should be sudden and complete. It would only be the harder for her to undergo the slow, harrowing process of a gradual alienation. Still, she hesitated. It was almost too much to have to abase herself before him. "If I had met you earlier!" she exclaimed with sudden vehemence, clutching desperately at the only means of excusing herself. "You would, at least, have protected me from *him*. I think I could have been what I pretended to be." She paused, trembling at the horror of what she *must* say, and then hurried on wildly.

"Why did you come into my life so late?"—there was pitiful upbraiding in her tone—"Why did you awaken in me new thoughts, new aspirations, only to show me what I had missed? I would never have known; I would not have suffered. It was cruel of you—though you did not know it—to lift me out of myself, when you had nothing for me in your heart. Until I met you, men had been more or less contemptible—ah, you had no right to disturb my indifference; *you* did not care. You taught me what love was: I learned, for the first time, that there could be nobility in men. You compelled me to honour you, to believe in you, to wish

to imitate you, even though I knew your virtues were beyond my reach. And for what? That I might be brought face to face, at last, with your icy insistence upon my *fitness* to marry you. I am not fit—I could not be; but if you loved me—No, no; it was not your fault. How could you suspect what I really was, or imagine the effect upon a woman like me of contact with a man who opened a new world to her? You came here to marry me—why? Because you were bound to me; you wished to protect me; you were determined to believe me pure. You never once said to yourself—'Whatever she is, she must be mine.' Did you not boast to me, once, that even passion would never reconcile you to a woman you could not respect? I persuaded myself you were not so strong as you thought; that it was possible to ensnare you as I had ensnared other men—you see I keep back nothing; why should I, now? I was a fool—a vain, reckless fool. But I am punished—even your hard sense of justice should be satisfied. You exact the truth from me; well, you shall have it. Mrs. Tippett did not exaggerate; I *am* an adventuress; I was trained to be one by Edgar Cheston. I was his willing accomplice even after I had ceased to be his dupe. Why do you not shrink from me? There is pollution for you in my touch!"

Her eyes blazed with fierce defiance—let him think the worst of her, if he would. It *was* partly his work. She might not have been so guilty but for him; at least, she would not have realised her guilt: if she had never known him, she might have gone on sinning to the end, without a twinge. He *would* think the worst. He was so complacently virtuous, so sure of his own rectitude, so humble in his attitude towards her, that it would be impossible for him to conceive of himself as tempting her. How could he comprehend? He would make no allowances; he would judge her inexorably according to his ideas of what a woman ought to be.

Ah, no, there must be some pity in his heart, some faint perception of the cruelty of it for her. She would go mad if she carried away with her only his contempt.

"You do not quite loathe me?" she asked imploringly, breaking down and burying her face in her hands, "you will remember me sometimes only as I was to you—will you not? That was my inner self—the self that none but you could ever have revealed to me; the self that might have grown to maturity had it not been starved and stunted from the first. I never had a chance—can you believe me in spite of what I am, and—and understand?"

Basil gazed at her, speechless. He was dumb with amazement and pain. She *was* what Mrs. Tippett had declared her to be—this lovely, innocent-looking creature whom he had reverenced as one of the purest, the noblest of women! He had heard her confession with a growing sense of its awfulness for her, the bitterness of its reproach for him. She was right; he was greatly to blame. But for him, she need not have suffered as she was suffering now. Even though she exaggerated his influence over her—as of course she did—he could comprehend its importance to a woman who had had her experience of men. She had invested him with attributes which seemed quite ordinary to him, but were phenomenal to her. In his blindness, he had unwittingly encouraged her to pin all her hopes upon him, and he had failed her now in her desperate need. It was a tragedy—nothing less; a tragedy all the more pitiful because it ought never to have befallen her. Ah, yes, he saw it all so clearly! As she had said, she had never had a chance. Even as a child—poor little innocent!—she had been immeshed. A web of corrupting influences had been spun about her with a devilish cunning which knew no pity, which guided her inexorably to the fulfilment of a destiny that was worse than death. It was frightful. What could he do? Where did his honour

lie? His honour! It was nothing beside her dire need of help. But he could not bring himself to do the only thing that would help her—to utter the lie, "I love you, in spite of all."

"What will become of you?" he stammered, feeling himself to be miserably incapable and foolish. His question seemed to him brutal. It implied a readiness to accept the detachment of himself from her, as she had proposed, which he was really far from feeling. If there were only some way out of it—some means by which he could still associate himself with her!

Her eyes brightened for a moment with a grateful glance: he still concerned himself about her!

"It is good of you to ask," she said, and then, her face clouding again, she added, with a touch of recklessness, "Don't worry about me. I haven't thought of what I shall do, but I shan't starve. There's the stage; I can return to it. Can you forgive me? That is all I care about, now."

"What have I to forgive? If you leave us, I shall never think of you except as a dear friend whom I have lost."

"Yes, lost," she cried bitterly—"lost to every one as to you. I am burying the woman *you* knew; no one else shall ever know her, and I—I shall try to forget her. I strove so hard to be better for your sake, Basil; I shall never be so silly again. It is too much trouble; it gives one too many heartaches! I was fashioned for other things—things that you abhor. I must go back to them; all other doors are closed to me. Our friendship has been a mere episode in your life—nothing more. For me, it was all the life worth living I shall ever know. The rest will be merely drifting, and if some sudden eddy should drag me under, so much the better. Oh, really, you need have no solicitude for me!

I shall not deserve it. You are free to go to her you love. I could never understand why you love her, but it is so. I know it, well, though you have tried hard to hide it from me. And she is pining for you. Don't waste your time here!"

There was savage irony in her voice. The love of Lydia seemed to her such a trivial thing compared with the gravity, the depth—yes, the grandeur of her passion. She had sinned against this man—but only under compulsion; how willingly she would have sinned, aye, to the farthest limit, for him. That prim little Puritan was incapable of such abandon; she would have shrunk from the mere thought of it in holy horror; religious prejudices had made her half-hearted, timid. Yet he worshipped her, and even the faintest shade of love in her would set his blood on fire: she knew it. She flung the pitiful thing to him contemptuously. If that was his only idea of happiness, let him have it. It was no loss to her now that she was nothing more than a "friend" to him. A friend! Good God! And it had been reserved for her to point the way for him to the fruition of his passion. He might have gone blundering on for months, perhaps for years, imagining Lydia was indifferent to him, but for her. What a mockery it was of her wild dreams!

Basil did not seem inclined to obey her, but lingered, irresolute. Of course, that was nonsense about Lydia's "pining" for him, and he felt more strongly than ever the obligation to aid Judith in some way. But what aid could he give? All was over between them. Even gratitude and pity did not demand of him that he should link his life with that of a woman whom he could never love, whose past would always rise up before him a thing of horror. And could he have brought himself to such a sacrifice, she would not have accepted it—he saw that, clearly. Ah, she was really noble in spite of all! She wanted nothing of him

but his love; she had not deceived *him* for any mercenary object. No; of himself, he could not help her, but might he not enlist the good offices of the family at the Manor? An invitation from them, perhaps, would change her purpose. If they assured her of their support, she might be induced to remain and live down the scandal. Anything were better than a return to her former life, especially in her present mood. But there was Lydia. Judith was evidently inflamed against her. Basil felt instinctively it would be impossible to reconcile them. It were idle, of course, to appeal to Mrs. Tippett, and he was uncertain as to the attitude towards her which the Colonel's wife and mother might take. Besides, she seemed so competent, so strong, so bitter. He could imagine her scorning any offer of assistance.

"Is there nothing I can do for you?" he asked lamely, "I mean—about the Rector."

"Nothing," she answered. "Mrs. Tippett will doubtless make the arrangements for the funeral."

She was anxious for him to go. She could not bear the strain much longer.

"I shall ride over in the morning," he said.

She did not tell him she would not be there, but merely thanked him and said good-bye. By the morning, she hoped, she would be far away.

She stood at a window watching him as he mounted his horse and rode off. She would never see him again—if she could help it. All she asked was forgetfulness, distraction of some kind. She might find the latter, now and then, in the life of the stage; in the homage she had learned to despise; in the adulation of men whom she *could* bend to her will. Good was not for her; might not evil have its uses? She was a social Ishmaelite once more, free to follow her impulses, unfettered by either love or fear—Basil Kent, Edgar

Cheston, were they not both dead to her now? And those impulses would not be kindly. Life had used her hardly; she would get out of it whatever might recompense her, if ever so little, without regard for those who ministered to her desires. She was still beautiful. She could use her beauty as she pleased, without having to account to any one. Now that Edgar Cheston was dead, no man should ever again be able to call her his slave. She might be sure she would never meet another Basil Kent. She thirsted for vengeance on the kind of men who had made her unfit for him. But for them, she might have been worthy of him. Edgar Cheston was beyond the reach of punishment, but there were others who had helped him to shape her life, to bring her to *this*. Ah, she would make them suffer—in the only way they could suffer: she would squander her beauty in torturing their lust. What else was there for her to choose? Was she not a pariah from whom all the virtuous would shrink? And the bad—would they not flock about her, struggling, like so many vultures, who should be the first to pull her down, to make her his prey? Whithersoever she turned, there would be no mercy for her. She stretched out her hands with a gesture of despairing wrath, and her bosom heaved. Let it be so: she would ask no mercy and give none. Blow for blow, and her moments of victory—she would have them, she was sure—would be sweet.

CHAPTER XLIII

On his way home, Basil speculated, at first rather vaguely, upon what Judith had said of Lydia. Could it be that Lydia thought more gently of him? Had his absence wrought a change? It might be that her feeling against him had softened when he was no longer at hand to vex her, as he must have done, with the tacit importunity of his presence. It was tempting to think that Judith, perhaps, had some slight ground for her assertion. She had had better opportunities for learning what Lydia actually felt than probably any one else. They were girls of nearly the same age, and cousins; no doubt, they had, at times, confided in each other.

If Lydia had merely brought herself to the point of forgiving his political offenses—that would be something; he might approach her with the hope of being no longer unwelcome. He would be content with little. It would be happiness for him merely to meet her on friendly terms. Why should he not satisfy himself as to her real attitude towards him? He was free to seek her. Judith had surrendered all claims upon him, and had even urged him to hasten to her. What a strange irony of fate if she should prove to be the agent of their reconciliation! When he drew up at the Manor gate, he hesitated a moment, and then decided to make the venture.

On reaching the house, he was informed by Pompey, who came to the door, that Young Miss had started a few minutes before for the Indian Spring. Basil tied his horse to one of the hitching posts, and set out across the fields. The Indian Spring! It was there he had told her of his love, and won from her the scant permission to pay a kind of court to her

—a concession she had soon recalled. He was cheered by the fact that she had sought this spot.

Lydia had gone for a walk, a breath of fresh air. She never took this path without thinking of Basil. Except for that wretched day at the fox hunt, it was at the spring that she had seen him alone for the last time. How little she had dreamed, when she dismissed him so negligently there, that she was sending him away from her forever! The place had grown very dear to her in spite of the pain her visits caused her; there seemed to linger about it some breath of Basil—of the Basil who had gazed at her there with such ardent eyes, and had uttered those words of love which now had grown so precious in her memory. He was hers then, surely. The spot united them again in thought, at least, and so, when she felt loneliest, she always sought it. Her heart was almost heavier now than it had ever been before. The bodies of her brother and her uncle had been recovered from the cove, and were lying side by side in the hall. The family was torn with grief; the atmosphere of the house was one of suffocating gloom, and now that her mother was quiet, she had hastened to escape from it for a little while. It seemed as if fate were doubly cruel to her. The family tragedy had followed swiftly upon the blow she had suffered at Basil's hands when he met her advances so coldly. He was not willing to give her even a kind word. No doubt, he was now with Judith, assuring her of his devotion. It were enough, Lydia fancied, for him to hear of Mrs. Tippett's imputations to cause him to hasten to Judith's side. *She* would have done it in his place, and he was more generous than she. Even if Judith had erred, and Lydia did not for a moment believe her guilty of what Mrs. Tippett asserted, Basil would have no words of aught but comfort for her. Did he not love her? And Judith was so beautiful, so captivating, that no one in her presence could think of blame. It

was the conviction of all this that hurt her so. But for her childish ignorance and folly that day at the spring, and afterwards, it might be at her side, not Judith's, that he would now be uttering words of sympathy and love.

She was very tired. As she moved slowly along the well-known path, she felt the contrast of her lagging gait with the buoyancy of step with which she had trod it that April morning with Basil. It was autumn now, and things were dead, like her hopes of but a few months ago. The skies were leaden, the fields sere and faded, the trees robbed of nearly all their leaves. When she reached the spring, at last, so far from feeling refreshed, she was almost exhausted. She wished she could have a "good cry." But tears did not come easily of late. She had grown used to bearing things without giving way.

The spot was beautiful still, but no longer with the freshness and radiance of spring, and there was a touch of melancholy in its nakedness. The brook was the same, but it sang a chillier song. The birds struck notes that seemed almost harsh, and there was none of the gay caroling of that bright April day. The delicate blending of tints in wood and thicket was gone, and there were only the russets and browns of the carpet of leaves that covered the hillside, and the gray or black or umber of the different species of trees. But there was enough in it all to recall to her vividly the incidents that had made so fateful an impression upon her life. How happy, how careless, how foolishly proud she had been! Ah, if she could but live it over once more! A wave of passionate regret and longing swept through her, jarring every nerve. Faint with emotion, she leaned against the trunk of a giant elm that overlooked the spring, and gazed about her with dry, burning eyes. Her gaze had in it an intense, compelling look, as if it sought to revive the past and make it real.

A footstep, crunching the dead leaves, caused her to start and look round. The intruder, she saw, at a glance, was Basil. What had brought him? What could be the meaning of their meeting *here?* Trembling, she waited for him to speak. He did not speak, but questioned her with his eyes. His anxiety was plainly as great as her own. They had only to look at each other to learn the truth. Love spoke in their faces with an eloquence that needed no words. Lydia was the less doubtful of the two. Basil's look was, for her, reminiscent. It carried her back to those moments when a consuming eagerness had shone in his eyes, as now. It seemed to her almost as if they had never stirred from the spot, as if all the misery she had suffered since then had been only a hateful dream. She did not stop to ask herself what had happened between him and Judith. It was enough that he was here, beside her; never, as she hoped, to leave her again.

"Basil!" she cried, in a tone he had never heard before. There was invitation in it; the rush of pent-up forces; a clear note of love.

"Lydia!" he answered, his brain in a whirl. Each took a step forward involuntarily, and without knowing how it happened, he found her in his arms. He held her awkwardly for a moment, not daring to caress her, as if he feared to frighten her away. But when he felt her head nestling confidently on his shoulder, and looking down, saw her glorious eyes gazing shyly up at him, he took courage and kissed the tempting little mouth which she seemed to offer him, just as she had often done as a child. Was she really his? Could this thing be? It had come to him so suddenly—the consummation of dreams that had never taken the substance of actual hope; which, of late, he had persuaded himself were beyond the range of possibility. It seemed incredible that he should have won so great a prize.

"I have learned something, Basil," she whispered, with a touch of the old mischief in her voice. "I'm not such an ignoramus, now, as Uncle Josias once said I was. I shan't object to your loving me as much as you please. I treated you abominably that day when we were here—how long ago it seems!—but I didn't know. You'll forgive me—won't you? I was only a silly girl, and perhaps, I'm not much better even yet; but at least, I know what you are to me. I've needed you so much!"

"You're not afraid to trust yourself to me?" he asked, with a happy laugh, recalling her denunciation of matrimony as a form of servitude impossible for her. "You've given up the idea of becoming an old maid? Remember, you said you could never promise to obey: I may prove to be a tyrant, you know!"

"No, I'm not afraid," she said, with a confident smile. "The danger doesn't seem so great now that I have discovered what your love really means. I've had time—such a long time!—to think over what you said to me here. It wasn't until I feared I had lost you that I began to think. Then, I knew you were everything to me—more than the independence, the freedom of which I was so proud; oh, infinitely more than all I had cherished until then! A tyrant? You couldn't be hard with me—could you?—and if you were, I wouldn't complain. Do you wonder I am so meek? I love you, Basil!"

I love you! The words thrilled him. What inexpressible happiness they implied. Ah, they were worth waiting for! Did they not repay him exorbitantly for all he had had to bear? Was it possible she felt for him all he felt for her; that she might actually hunger for a look from him, a touch, a gentler word?

"Take care!" he exclaimed, "you'll make me conceited: I am tempted to cry out, 'See what a fine fellow I am; *she*

loves me!' Oh, Lydia, the world is a new world for me. God is so good to me; He has granted my heart's desire."

He bowed his head in unconscious thanksgiving as he spoke. At the moment, the birds were silent; only the murmur of the brook and the faint sighing of the wind among the trees could be heard. But to both Lydia and Basil, it seemed as if there were jubilation all about them. There is no sweeter music than that with which great happiness fills all space.

CHAPTER XLIV

Lydia and Basil were married during Christmas week. This was the one great festival of the year on the plantations, with lesser holidays at Easter and Whitsuntide. At Christmas, the slaves enjoyed special indulgences, as of prescriptive right, and usually succeeded in extracting largesses from even the most niggardly master or mistress. Most of the plantations had been deserted by the negroes, but enticing memories of Christmas at the Quarter attracted many of the fugitives back to their former homes, and at nearly all the Quarters—including, much to the Colonel's gratification, the Quarter at the Manor—joy reigned again. Huge open fires shone on happy, laughing faces. Dusky figures grouped themselves about a banjoist or a fiddler, singing gaily, patting juba, and breaking out, now then, into a lively hoe-down or double-shuffle. Old uncles, in snug corners by the fireside, amused the pickaninnies, and perhaps, a "Young Marse," with blood-curdling ghost stories or exciting narratives of adventures in hunting the 'coon or 'possum. At daybreak Christmas morning, there was a procession of men, women and children from every Quarter to "de big house," there to lie in wait for different members of the family, and "ketch" them "Chrismus gif'."

The spirit of the occasion invaded even the grief-stricken household at the Manor and imparted cheerfulness to the general atmosphere, which had already been brightened by Lydia's happiness and the Colonel's conviction that Basil would help him out of his difficulties. The Colonel's wife

seemed actually to gain in strength and animation, and Ole Miss had never been more alert, more energetic. She, too, was confident that Basil would straighten out things.

The morning of the wedding day dawned clear and crisp. A deep snow had wreathed the shrubbery of lawn and garden with delicate lace work of many patterns, and had cast a feathery mantle over the earth. The jingle of sleigh-bells was heard everywhere on the roads. Their blithe music was destined to linger long in the memories of many as a reminder that the Old Order had then had its last fling. Cæsar, however, put his veto on the Colonel's mandate for a sleigh in which to convey the wedding party to church. Nothing less than the big coach, he insisted, would comport with the dignity of the occasion. He impressed Pompey as footman, and himself handled the reins, having carefully fed and groomed the spirited horses for a week in advance, so that they curveted and pranced and bore themselves as smartly as he could have wished.

In all its history—even in the old colonial days of pomp and display, of silks and satins for men as well as women —Winton Church had seldom presented a brighter interior. To its Christmas garb of holly and cedar, had been added a profusion of hot-house plants and flowers. The altar was lighted with wax tapers, an innovation of the new rector, a clergyman of High Church tendencies, and these, with the sunshine reflected from the snow outside, lit up the scene with unusual brilliance. From stained glass windows in one of the gable-ends, streamed a flood of crimson and purple beams which fell here and there on the quaint, high-backed pews filled to overflowing with the gentry of the neighbourhood and people of every shade of social condition. All the servants from the Manor, including many of the runaways, together with negroes from neighbouring plantations, were assembled in the gallery, and the sprinkling of turbaned

"aunties" contributed not a little to the general effect with their lively Sunday gowns and flaming bandannas.

The churchyard was filled with sleighs, the restive horses stamping or pawing the snow and causing their strings of bells to tinkle gaily. The negro drivers, smiling with holiday good humour, gossiped together in groups. It almost seemed as if the old church itself had furbished up for the occasion. Certainly, its weather-beaten countenance had never looked smarter. The bright sunshine gave its thick growth of ivy a richer green and chequered its sober walls of drab and brown with ruddier tints.

There was a reception at the Manor which lasted the whole afternoon and late into the night, and notwithstanding the absence of many familiar figures, owing to the general exodus South, the gathering was typical of conditions that were soon to exist no more. There was much feasting and unlimited toasting of the bride. It was all exactly as it should be, in the opinion of Mr. Plunkett, who officiated as master of ceremonies. He would have felt that something had gone wrong, had any one of the guests failed to get as comfortably tipsy as he wished. As for the ladies, they had retired long before the jollification had reached its climax in a general state of hilarity, and though they had very definite suspicions as to what was going on, no intimation of it was permitted to reach their ears. As the gray of morning peeped in upon the scene, "Marse Jose" turned to the Colonel, with a sigh of satisfaction. "That was something like a wedding!" he exclaimed, "but it was hard work, with only a handful of niggers. There'll be precious few more of its kind. Entertaining, sir, will soon be a lost art with us."

Basil did not return to the army because of his wound, which had incapacitated him for active service. At the Colonel's request, he at once took charge of affairs at the Manor. Reeve exhibited an eager readiness to accom-

modate matters, now that Basil was in control. He deemed it prudent to omit from his list of claims certain charges he had meant to exact. He even professed perfect willingness to renew the mortgages for a longer period, and was profuse in his offers to give Basil any assistance he might need. All hope of realising his schemes had ended with Lydia's marriage, and he was anxious to save himself from the imputation of having taken advantage of the Colonel. He had succeeded in obtaining his son's release from prison, and was disposed to congratulate himself if he could contrive to satisfy Basil. For his part, Basil was well content with the terms he offered. The prices of grain and cattle were constantly rising in consequence of the war, and he had little doubt of his ability to pay off the Colonel's indebtedness in course of time. It was not an easy task, however, and for several years, he was compelled to work hard and to suffer much anxiety. At last, by dint of close economy and the sale of some outlying lands, he was enabled to announce to the Colonel that he was once more solvent. The Colonel at once regained much of his old buoyancy of spirits. His credit was saved; the family dignity was again secure. Lydia was very proud of Basil's success, which had so fully justified her faith in him. Old Cæsar, too, was immensely gratified, and plumed himself on having helped to bring about the change. Basil had restored him to his old position of overseer, and he had proven himself a most zealous and capable lieutenant.

"Ef Ole Marster (the Judge) kin see what's happenin' down hyar, Mistus," he said to Ole Miss one day, "he must feel mighty peart en' comfortable. De Manor wasn't enny better off in his day, even. Marse Basil's brung it right up." He did not add what was clear to his mind—that Young Miss's "good looks" were of some use, after all, in having "ketched" her such a husband as Marse Basil.

Ole Miss nodded assent with a cheerful smile. Yes, her husband's heart would be gladdened, if he could know. The Manor had not been merely a place, to him, but an idea. It was a heritage, in trust, to be preserved, improved, developed for future generations. It was the basis of the family influence and position. Without it to sustain and inspire them, the Chestons must sink to the common level. His anxiety on this point had been extreme; but now, his fears would have been set at rest. Basil's intelligence and will supplied the saving force that was needed. She was deeply grateful to him; her manner towards him was always tender; she rendered him a kind of deference which was often embarrassing. The pathos of it touched him. He knew that, in her heart, she was always regretting he was not a Cheston. Ah yes, if he were but one of her own name and blood! She often sighed at the thought that after the death of her son, the Colonel, there would be no more Chestons of the Manor. But Lydia bore a son, and at Basil's suggestion, it was decided that he should be called Cheston, without prefixing Robert, as they had meant to do in honor of his grandfather, in order that the name might continue to be associated with the place.

The close of Ole Miss's life, comforted by this assurance and by the return of peace and prosperity to the Manor, was tranquil and even happy. To the last, she exhibited the keenest interest in the family affairs and exercised the same controlling influence in the household. She lived to be nearly ninety, and up to within a few weeks of her death, made her appearance almost every Sunday at church. Cæsar, as had always been his habit, continued to drive her coach whenever she went abroad. Upon its arrival at the church door, he descended with impressive deliberation from the box, let down the folding steps, and lifting his hat, held out his hand to help Ole Miss alight. Sometimes, in the Colonel's absence,

she took his arm, and the old negro, proud of this office, escorted her up the aisle to the family pew with head erect and a manner to the full as dignified as her own.

The Colonel remained an "unreconstructed rebel," a thorough "Bourbon" to the end of his days. After the close of the war, he took but little part in public affairs, and seldom set foot off the Manor. The country, in his opinion, was going to the dogs. The general chaos which the downfall of slavery had brought about bewildered and distressed him. At home, his life was much the same as it had always been, but beyond the confines of the Manor, all was confusion. He mourned especially the rapid decay of the distinctive practices of Tidewater hospitality which had depended for their existence upon the maintenance of slavery. The frequent interchange of courtesies, the lavish entertainments, the dances, the dinners, the fox-hunts were no longer possible for a people who suddenly found themselves compelled to face the hardest privations and to labour painfully, and in most cases, ineffectively, to save something from the wreck of their fortunes. His caste was doomed—the Colonel saw this clearly—and his heart was saddened when he thought of all it meant to him. Still, on the whole, he was not unhappy. He fully realised the fact that he was far luckier than many of his neighbours. His future, and the future of all his household, was secure. He was "Marster," still, to Cæsar and Dinah, Pompey and Phyllis; and his heart was rejoiced by the thought that there was a young "Marster" who bade fair to become a worthy representative of the name he bore.

It was the Colonel's chief pleasure in his old age to instruct his grandson in the habits, tastes and principles which he deemed indispensable to a gentleman. He taught him to ride, to shoot, to manage a canoe, to carve a canvas-back duck, to enter a room, to bow to a lady, and to do any number of things which he thought important. Under his tutelage,

the boy became quite skilful with the flute, of which the Colonel was a master, and learned to play all the old-fashioned airs, such as Malbrook, Bonnie Dundee, Black Eyed Susan. At the age of sixteen, he was quite an authority on horses and fox-hunting. His manners were perfect, his grandfather thought ; he seemed to have a due regard for his ancestry, and he could repeat the main facts of the family genealogy without omitting any one of the many links.

The Colonel never aired his political prejudices before the lad. That part of his training, he decided, must be left to Basil; otherwise, he might have created differences between father and son. He sometimes indemnified himself, however, by arguing hotly with Basil, when they were safe out of Cheston's hearing, as to the practical results of the war which, he insisted, were wholly disastrous.

Although Basil could not be induced to recant any of his opinions, he was compelled to admit that some of the changes were even worse than he had feared. He saw, with sorrow, that, as he had anticipated, the salutary influences of the old social system were slowly but surely disappearing, to give place to a confused medley of new ideas and impulses. The spirit of genial contentment had been succeeded by one of general unrest. Men began to elbow each other rudely. The business affairs of the community fell into disorder. The whole fabric of industry and trade which had rested on the plantation system toppled over now that the foundation stone of slavery had been removed. There had been large mercantile dealings with planters owning many slaves. These had ceased. Many of the planters were now no larger purchasers than some of the "poor whites"; in place of their old prodigality, nearly all of them were forced to practise a greater or less degree of economy. Everything was cheapened and reduced to smaller proportions. A host of small shops took the place of the old-fashioned, roomy

stores with their large stocks of goods, and a keen, eager competition was substituted for the urbanity and indolence which had formerly characterised business methods.

Men were now anxious to make money in ways that would, but a few years before, have been considered questionable or even dishonest. The planters, once so fastidious in matters of dress, bought their clothing and shoes ready made. Tailors and shoemakers began to disappear. Harness-makers, carriage-makers, wheelwrights found their occupations gone. The planters had discovered they could buy more cheaply from factories, and must do it. A small woollen mill in the neighbourhood, which had taken their wool to manufacture into yarns and kerseys for their slaves, closed its doors. Industry gradually narrowed its sphere of activities more and more, and labour became less and less efficient. A blight seemed to have fallen upon the whole community. The negroes suffered most of all. Many of them soon sank into a condition little short of their original barbarism, and while there were a few, here and there, who showed themselves to be industrious and thrifty, the great mass grew sadly idle and shiftless. Their former masters, now impoverished, had neither time nor means to "look after" them as they had been wont to do. There was no restraining influence, no stimulus to effort. It was easy for them to scratch a living by occasional labor in the fields or by taking fish and oysters. They showed an increasing tendency to herd together in the woods. Their habits were nomadic, predatory. Disorder and petty crimes grew rife among them. They were rapidly becoming an obnoxious element, and race prejudice assumed a new and bitter form.

But all this, Basil hoped, would prove to be but a temporary consequence of the upheaval caused by the war. After awhile, when things had settled down, the new condi-

tions would doubtless adjust themselves, and society would take on the normal aspect of free communities elsewhere. Without an exception, so far as he could discover, those communities were prosperous and happy. He overlooked the fact that their economy had developed from a wholly different base and had followed a consistent, uninterrupted course. It had suffered no sudden wrench or diversion, and race antagonisms could hardly be said to exist. As time wore on, he discovered that conditions were not adjusting themselves as he had expected: the confusion increased; the negroes continued to grow worse; the general tone of the community was palpably deteriorating. It was nothing less than a great social revolution that was being worked out without intelligence, by the mere play of mechanical forces, with no conscious effort on the part of any one to direct or control it.

Basil felt a strong sense of personal obligation to find some remedy, if it were only palliative: he was one of the few men in the region who, by taking sides with the victorious North, had helped to precipitate this convulsion. But the disorder was so widespread, so deeply ramified, that he speedily perceived the futility of attempting to do more than seek to extract, in his own immediate neighbourhood, from the coarse but virile elements which were slowly crystallising into a definite form of society, whatever might be beneficial, and to preserve, in so far as he could, the refining influences of the past. He might at least make the Manor a rallying point for the few who shared his views, and perhaps, play an unobtrusive but useful part in public affairs. For a long time, it was cheerless work. Even the more intelligent of his neighbours were lukewarm. The planters, generally, were either soured or reduced to apathy by the disaster that had overtaken them. Even the old habit of leadership failed to assert itself; their spirit

was broken. Besides, a new element was coming to the front. The "poor whites" were profiting by conditions fatal to the supremacy of their former rulers. As the planters, unable to adapt themselves to economies habitual to a labouring class, gradually fell behind, and one after another was "sold out," the thrifty tenants and many of the former overseers, who had been making money in the meantime, bought up the land. They became, in time, the real force of the community, and as soon as they realised this fact, they began to take advantage of it. There was more or less class rancour in the eagerness with which the more ambitious of them shoved their former patrons aside, denouncing them as dry-rotten "old fogies," and appealed to the "plain people" to assert themselves.

What Reeve predicted to Edgar had come to pass. It was the "new blood against the old," and Reeve, himself, was one of the first to profit by the change. He began to pose as a champion of popular rights against the "Bourbon" element, and to demand a "new deal" in political offices. His rise was rapid. A leader, shrewd, resourceful, unscrupulous, was needed to weld together the parts of the new political machinery which, as yet, was but a clumsy and inefficient piece of mechanism. Reeve proved himself to be a master hand. Men denounced him as a trickster, a demagogue, a schemer who would sacrifice his best friend when his personal interest was at stake, but he did not seem to mind in the least, and preserved an impassive calm under the most vicious assaults. Charges of corruption were brought against him; he did not answer them. He was accused of buying votes, of stuffing ballot boxes, of accepting bribes for "putting through" legislation for big corporations; of assessing office-holders for campaign purposes and pocketing the greater part of the proceeds. He held his tongue, and went on perfecting the organisation and

piling up "safe" majorities at every election. He had a genius for management, a perfect mastery of the details of "practical politics."

Naturally, he made some bitter enemies, but he had a disciplined army of followers and so-called friends. Men looked to him alone for preferment, and hung upon his lightest word as meaning either distinction or hopeless obscurity for them. No man could succeed in public life without his consent, and he took care that none should succeed who were likely to threaten his influence. The "plain people" had, indeed, rid themselves of a group of rulers, but they had merely substituted a single "boss" who governed them, not as the "aristocrats" had done, with more or less fidelity to high ideals, but for his own selfish purposes, without regard to the general good. His influence was, in fact, supreme.

Basil watched Reeve's rise to power with growing disheartenment. To his mind, it was symptomatic. The root of the disease was to be found in the people themselves—in their lowered standards, their increasing cupidity, their general acquiescence in the view that politics was a trade, and that their chief interest in the result of an election lay in the places or the jobs that might fall to their share. It was all the more hopeless for him to attempt to stem the tide because of the general prejudice against him as a "Yankee," though this was mitigated by the Colonel's acceptance of him as his son-in-law. Even when he was found to be a "good Democrat," Reeve succeeded in discrediting him by classing him with the "silk stocking crowd" whom he was constantly holding up to popular derision.

Still, he persevered. At least, he would preserve his own independence, and do what he could to build up a healthier sentiment. He busied himself with various schemes for improving the condition of those about him, and never seek-

ing or even consenting to accept an office for himself, was always to be found in the front of any movement for political reform. For years, he accomplished but little. Reeve beat him again and again by "overwhelming" majorities at the district primaries, in county conventions, and finally, in the State Legislature in a desperate fight on Basil's part to prevent his election as United States Senator. It was a bitter thing for Basil to see Reeve seated, as he saw him once—secure, self-confident, blandly condescending—in a place which, with but few exceptions, had been occupied by honourable, high-minded men. Reeve had now reached the summit of his political ambition. He could never hope to be President—he came from too small a state, and one that was south of Mason and Dixon's Line. Having nothing further to gain in political preferment, he turned his attention to making more money. He was not yet rich enough ; he aimed to become a great millionaire, and there were many "good things" open to a Senator. Of course, he was no longer susceptible to bribes. He could afford to be virtuous now, and his new dignity demanded that he should be severely circumspect. But he could speculate on legislation without sacrificing respectability, and there were corporations only too glad to let him in on the "ground floor."

Social honours came to him at last. People were eager to entertain so distinguished a personage. Even in his own county, he found himself a social power. The "old people" had been forced to take a back seat, and his supporters were now the dispensers of hospitality and even the arbiters in fashion, display and dress. His satisfaction was qualified by the fact that he was never able to enjoy the supreme delight of snubbing an aristocrat. Whenever he met a man like the Colonel, he had an uneasy consciousness that nothing he could do or say would matter to him. He was ever so much more comfortable in Washington. There, he had a

fine house on a fashionable street, and Oswald helped him to do the honours to a mob of people who thronged his parlours, ate his terrapin and drank his champagne, and ridiculed him behind his back. Oswald settled down to this sort of life with easy complaisance. His disappointment about Lydia had cured him of any higher ambition. Besides, in Washington, he had no very rigorous prejudices to face. Society there was not too exacting. It was made up of so many heterogeneous elements that few could afford to draw the lines closely, except the old "resident" families who were gradually losing their influence and becoming lost in the crowd. Oddly enough, too, Oswald commended himself even to them, because of the impression which his father managed to spread abroad that the Reeves were "old Maryland people," originally—a fiction which Oswald's manners seemed to confirm in spite of the Senator's vulgarisms which, at last, were set down as mere eccentricities.

Oswald rose to a certain prominence in course of time. He was a figure at the Club, a leader of germans, a desirable acquisition at "swell" entertainments. A reputation for being rather fast made him all the more interesting with women who liked to gossip about risqué things and felt a keen, if repressed curiosity concerning topics they had been taught to avoid. It seemed to them that they were associating with a dangerous, fascinating fellow who must be held in check, and there was excitement in the thought. The ease with which he carried it off impressed them the more. It was impossible to corner or embarrass him. He seemed to be a hardened sinner! It was whispered, for example, that he was having a desperate affair with the beautiful actress, Ethel Vane, the heroine of many sensational stories, and one day, he was seen walking with her on one of the principal streets. Several ladies of his acquaintance passed them, and all had the same story to tell. He pretended not to see

any one of them, they said, but sauntered along with his eyes fastened on the actress's face, talking and laughing, with brazen disregard of appearances. When he next met them, it was with the most natural air in the world, as if nothing whatever had happened. What could be done with such a wretch?

Ethel Vane was not in the least deceived by his affectation of not knowing the women they had met. She was well aware they were friends of his, and understood perfectly that he could not afford to recognise them when in her company. It would be a gross affront to them. She never resented these invidious distinctions. It was only what she had to expect. Had she not declared war upon society? Why should she complain if every woman who claimed to be respectable considered herself assailed, and struck at her with the only weapon at command—a real or pretended disdain? She had her moments of triumph, of biting reprisal. If Oswald's vanity was flattered by his apparent intimacy with her, it made no difference. Other men boasted of her favour when she was merely using them. Oswald had a strong claim upon her, but it was not what the world supposed. For her, he was a link which still connected her, to a certain extent, with the brief glimpse of happiness she had had as Judith Cheston; from him, she heard occasionally of the course of affairs at the Manor. She could not resist the desire to know what was happening to Basil. It was clear from what Oswald told her, from time to time, that he was not discontented. She suffered acutely from the repeated assurance that Lydia held him still in the bonds of a devotion which she had not been able to inspire, but though Oswald's reports always hurt her, she never failed to question him closely when he brought her news from the Manor.

In spite of her efforts to dissociate herself from him, Basil would always be the object of her secret curiosity. To her

surprise, she had discovered that the influence he had exerted was not to be shaken off. Even in the life she was leading—a life of reckless disregard of all that he would have prescribed for her—she was conscious of restraints imposed by what she imagined he would have wished. In moments of temptation, she often stopped short with a vivid sense of the amazement and pain he would doubtless feel at what she was about to do. Her heart bled at the thought that it might not really matter to him if he knew, but none the less, she often abstained. She even found pride in the fact that, whatever the world might say of her, she sometimes merited his approval. If she was guilty of cruelty to men and women who excited her animosity, it was usually in punishment of attempted treacheries to her or to others. He would have seen in them only scorpions of society for whom no penalty could be too severe. Against the innocent, the weak, the merely rash and improvident, her hand was but seldom raised. It was never raised when she had time to think.

To her more intimate associates, she was a strange puzzle —a woman apparently careless of her reputation and often cynically contemptuous of morality who, nevertheless, seemed at times impervious to influences which corroded every nature they touched. Every one assumed she must have some suitor whom she secretly favoured, yet none could point out the man. In reality, she thought more amiably of Oswald than of any other, but even with him, she was often cold and mocking, and never otherwise than negligently kind. There was a degree of sympathy between them, due, on her part, to perception of the fact that his fate was much like her own. He, too, had struggled for something better, higher than himself, and had been thrown back into a life of loneliness, of self-absorption, of mere materialism. If she was a woman whose life was empty, unlovely, hard, he was a man who had no longer anything to strive for; who

would grow old and fat and more and more selfish, and at last, would lose his social popularity and sink to the level of a mere club lounger and gossip, a superannuated beau.

The years sped on, and at last, a reaction came to Basil's aid. Long lease of power by a selfish individual, however adroit he may be, inevitably breeds abuses and discontent. Men began to say that Reeve had run things long enough, and ought to give some one else a chance. The ranks of the few who, with Basil, honestly deplored the degradation of politics were swelled by an increasing number of people whom Reeve had either been unable or unwilling to satisfy or had offended in one way or another. The public conscience, too, was really stirred. The evils of the existing system had become so patent that even the most indifferent were moved to shame and revolt. Basil was chosen, by general consent, as the one man who had always antagonised Reeve and was now, to most minds, above the suspicion of seeking aught for himself, to be the leader of a movement which swept Reeve from power and shattered the local "machine." His county attained and kept the distinction of being one of the few strongholds of reform in a boss-ridden state. The "practical politicians" predicted confidently that Basil would seize the opportunity of obtaining "something big." Of course, it was what he had been waiting for all along. Why should he have worked so hard against them, if he had not been seeking a capital prize? It was very clever of him to lie low all these years, and await his turn. They actually admired his "nerve," and began to think of him as the coming man to whom their allegiance might be profitably transferred. When Basil came forward to urge other men for places, and again declared his unalterable determination to remain in private life, the "heelers" were puzzled, and even dismayed. This was a flat reversal of all their experience. They could not account for it except upon the

theory that he was a "crank." If he really meant to keep the thing up, he was clearly dangerous: there would be little chance for them; their only hope was to make terms with those of his associates who might be induced to listen to reason.

Basil acted from policy as well as from preference. He felt that he would injure his cause if he swerved from the path he had chosen. The community needed a man who, while always ready to labour or to lead on behalf of better things, would be above the imagined temptation of office. None could successfully assail his motives so long as he held fast to this course: he would never be beholden to any; his influence, whatever it might be, would always appeal to the intelligence, the better part of men's natures. It would endure, and wax stronger, he hoped, as conviction spread in the popular mind, of his sincerity, his real devotion to the general good. He could be far more useful in this rôle, than in discharging the duties of any office. There were plenty of capable, honest men who were not unwilling to take the places to which he might easily have been called; there were few, if any, who envied him a power which brought no open reward.

It was the only kind of power he craved. He was far too happy at the Manor to wish for any other sphere. The life of the planter was, for him, the ideal life. There were peace and dignity and honest endeavour in it. His days were busy with congenial work in the management of his father's property as well as the Colonel's, and Lydia was always beside him with her vivid interest, her tireless energy, her bright, eager spirit to sustain and cheer him. The charm of her personality never lessened for him; it merely changed, with the flight of years, to something rarer and even more precious—a closer communion of spirit which made it seem to him impossible that they could ever be parted, even by

Death. She had developed, as he had thought she would, into a perfect plantation mistress of the traditional type ; she entered into all his occupations, his interests, his tastes, with an enthusiasm that was never dimmed. There were flashes, now and then, of her old wayward temper—he loved her for them all the more. Sometimes, when she showed a touch of jealousy at his preoccupation with his books or with interests more or less alien to her, his heart leaped with the same wild joy as on that day when she had confessed her love. They were a couple whom many people envied, and all who knew them, admired. Under their joint direction, the Manor became a focus of genial, beneficent influences which were felt far and near. It was one of the few, the very few, plantations where the old hospitality still reigned ; which shone, as of yore, a beacon of inspiration as well as of succour for all who needed aid. The "Quarter" was converted, in time, into an asylum for indigent or ailing negroes for miles around. Lydia ministered to them with her own hands : when death claimed them, she did not shrink from closing their eyes.

Although the Colonel could never be induced to admit that the losses to the community in the destruction of the old régime could be repaired, and insisted, to the last, that the negroes had been much happier as slaves, he was not insensible to Basil's unique popularity, and was very proud of his son-in-law. He sometimes twitted him laughingly with the assertion that he was but imitating the methods he had helped to pull down. It was in precisely the same way, he argued, that every large slaveholder had attained to power —by making himself generally useful and winning the respect of those about him. Basil deserved the more credit because the new conditions were so unfavourable. It was wonderful, in the Colonel's opinion, how completely he had restored the Manor to its old position of dignity and influ-

ence. The atmosphere of the place had hardly changed at all. When he saw the same well-known faces about him, the same familiar routine, the same customs as in slavery days, but little modified, it really seemed to him that Basil had found the secret of reconciling the new conditions with the old, so far as the Manor was concerned, and of founding the family fortunes anew on much the same basis of popular consideration and respect.

He had done even more. Basil's influence was not merely local. The Manor gradually became widely known as the home of a man of signal success in a field which, though limited, was of general interest because the problems which, it seemed, were being worked out there, were pressing more or less urgently for solution in the country at large. His political activity, so rare in its self-abnegation, excited the admiration of many thoughtful minds. Political reformers and students of economic and social questions solicited his views. He was often puzzled by the consideration they showed him; he did not know that they saw in him a man who had done things about which they had only theorized. Visitors from the larger cities were frequent, and a distinctly intellectual flavour was imparted to the Manor hospitality—reminding the Colonel of the days when his father, the Judge, had attracted notabilities to his table. But Basil's visitors were often men of even a higher stamp. The Colonel sat among them pleased yet wondering, unable to follow them in some of their more recondite discussions. It was a source of great satisfaction to him to find that his son-in-law was seldom at fault and seemed well abreast of current questions. And even more gratifying was Mr. Kent's participation in these gatherings. To the Colonel's mind, there could be no stronger evidence of the superiority of the mental pabulum served up at the Manor than the fact that it served to coax his hermit friend from his retirement. Mr. Kent, indeed,

came often to the Manor after his first timid essay, and showed himself lively, and even aggressive, in debate. Little by little, he acquired a relish for the ordinary life at the Manor, and sometimes forgot himself so far as to ride over when there were no literary lions to tempt him, and chat freely with the Colonel of trivial things. The change in him was little short of a miracle in the Colonel's eyes. It was Basil who had wrought this, also, by creating the only influences which could have rejuvenated such a man—a man whose absorption in his books had threatened to make a hopeless fossil of him.

Well—had he not often said there were very few men like Basil? In the Colonel's opinion, he was a rara avis. It were idle to hope that the other planters would be able to imitate him, even in the management of their estates. The Colonel found strong confirmation of this theory in the dwindling number of his friends who still retained possession of their old homes, and in the inability of even these to do more than make both ends meet. It was all the more comforting to him to feel that, long after he himself was no more, the old place would still be a memorial of that vanished past which was so dear to him, which could never be restored.

He was sure his grandson would follow in the footsteps of his father. A finer young fellow, he was confident, had never lived. Cheston was, in fact, a noble-looking youth, with his mother's brilliant dark eyes and her finely-cut features redeemed from effeminacy by his father's energy and seriousness. His temper, like his father's, was slow and grave, but there were flashes, now and then, of his mother's spirit. The Colonel was all the better satisfied with him because of the phlegm which formed the basis of his character. "The boy has balance," he often said to himself, delighted at Cheston's possession of a quality in which he felt he had been painfully lacking. "The Manor will run no risks from him."

On the other hand, there were points of resemblance between himself and his grandson which gratified his family pride and endeared him all the more to him. It was delightful to see himself living his youth over again in some of Cheston's impulses and tastes. "He has none of my faults," the humbled old squire assured himself, "but he is a thorough Cheston, thank God!"

The Colonel might have spoiled his grandson, had he lived much longer, for there was no indulgence he would not grant him, but before any serious harm had been done, "Ole Marster"—one of the very few of the Tidewater squires who were enabled to preserve their habits, their idiosyncracies, their state to the last—passed away. The end came one afternoon while he was dozing in his arm-chair on the front verandah. He sank imperceptibly from sleep into death, without the pain of parting from his loved ones. The Angel of Death had never been kinder. The passing of his sable wing cast no shadow on the still, white face. The strongly chiselled features gleamed like sculptured marble in the last rays of the setting sun, and winning a finer quality from death, were stamped with a spiritual dignity and beauty they had but intimated, at times, in life. The Colonel's career, in its higher and truer meaning, was epitomised in the calm, benignant mask fast changing into stone. No one could have looked upon him now without feeling that here rested one who had been a true-hearted, high-minded gentleman, not destitute of weaknesses and faults, but with a soul, void of guile, which must instinctively have risen superior to every sordid or unworthy impulse.

He was laid in a corner of the graveyard where the violets grew thickest, in the shade of a favourite elm. His wife and his mother lie beside him, and staunch old Cæsar and Dinah sleep at his feet.

THE END.

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